West River Pioneer: A Woman's Story, 1911-1915

Part One

ANNA LANGHORNE WALTZ

Editors' Note: *Philadelphia native Anna Langhorne came to Burke, South Dakota, in 1911 after her marriage to A. Pierce Waltz, who served as a Baptist missionary there. As pastor and wife, the couple ministered to the twentieth-century pioneers who were participating in South Dakota's last land boom. When the Sioux Agreement of 1889 divided the Great Sioux Reservation of western South Dakota into six smaller Indian reservations, it opened millions of acres of land to white settlers. Between 1904 and 1913, five of these smaller reservations were further reduced in size by a series of agreements that allowed white settlers to purchase reservation lands, with the United States government holding the proceeds in trust for the Lakota people. Lottery sale of these "surplus" Indian lands and the construction of new railroads, combined with an expanding national economy and a growing scarcity of agricultural land back east, attracted tens of thousands of settlers to the isolated, semiarid region west of the Missouri River.*[1]

1. A recent and comprehensive account of the last land boom can be found in Paula M. Nelson's *After the West Was Won: Homesteaders and Town-Builders in Western South Dakota, 1900-1917* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1986).

From 1911 to 1913, Reverend and Anna Waltz were town dwellers, serving churches in Burke and Lucas and visiting their parishioners on the surrounding homesteads and ranches. In 1913, however, the young couple succumbed to the land fever of the times and bought a relinquished homestead ten miles west of the town of White River in Mellette County. Early in 1914, five months after the birth of their first child, Anna Waltz moved with the baby into a sod house on the claim, where she spent the next fourteen months alone, fulfilling homestead residency requirements. After proving up, she rejoined her husband in Deadwood, where he had been called shortly after they acquired the claim.

Many years after these events, between 1945 and 1948, Anna Waltz recorded her early experiences as a minister's wife in South Dakota and as a homesteader in Mellette County. "Personal experience" books like the best-selling The Egg and I *were popular at the time, and her daughter Dorothy Waltz Lewis suggested that Anna "had better experiences to relate" than some of those authors.*[2] *The manuscript that Anna Waltz produced in response to her daughter's urging covers the years 1911 to 1915, and it will appear here in four installments. Anna Waltz's children, Dorothy Waltz Lewis of Sherman Oaks, California, Allen P. Waltz of Chesterfield, Missouri, Lenore Waltz Wade of Kansas City, Missouri, and Richard L. Waltz of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, have generously given their permission for its reproduction in* South Dakota History. *Anna Langhorne Waltz died in 1957, after living in South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, and Kansas during her husband's forty-nine-year career as a minister.*

The events, the thoughts, and the feelings in Anna Waltz's account are all recorded essentially as she experienced them. Her husband's straightforward memoir of the same time period verifies her account and, on occasion, helps to point out small liberties that Anna took with chronology.[3] *In writing of her experiences, Anna Waltz attempted to give her family an entertaining story, not just a historical document. As a result, she sometimes exaggerated or embellished events for dramatic effect and introduced dialogue to vary and facilitate the narrative. In editing the*

2. In preparing her mother's manuscript for other family members, Dorothy Waltz Lewis included this information in a note of explanation.

3. A. Pierce Waltz, "This is My Life: A Few Memories of My Youth—Education—Ministry—Retirement," 1959, Richard L. Waltz family papers, Sioux Falls, S.Dak.

manuscript for publication, we have tried to aid the author in her quest to make this story a thoroughly readable account. We have trimmed and edited her sometimes artificial dialogue and, to conserve space, have omitted particularly fulsome and repetitive passages.

Taken in the mid-1940s, this photograph shows Anna Langhorne and A. Pierce Waltz at about the time that Anna was writing her memoir of their early years in South Dakota.

The memoir is, by turns, humorous, touching, suspenseful, and even tragic, but a sense of unflagging optimism is always present. Thus, the comments that Anna Waltz made when she completed the project come as a surprise and are, perhaps, as illuminating as the story itself. "It has been quite an undertaking for an

old lady," she wrote to her daughter Dorothy. "The worst thing about it was the reliving *of some of the experiences that I never wanted to think about again. But it is finished. . . . It made me a little nervous to go over some of those things again, but now I can just forget about it and feel free again."*[4] *As the following memoir shows, life on the last frontier was often a struggle, but Anna Waltz's eloquent account is a testimony to the spirit and courage of the people who homesteaded in the west river country.*

Arrival in Burke

Why? When it comes to this question, I think we are all like little children wanting to know the "why" for the things we find ourselves undertaking or planning. Thus I caught myself asking the question why.

The train was nearing the little western town where I was to get off and continue the remainder of the journey by wagon. I was wondering what the country and the people would be like and what would be the outcome of it all. Why had this tiny burg been selected as our destination, situated out on the prairie of South Dakota in the Rosebud Indian Reservation?

My life so far had been spent in the large cities of the East with conveniences of all kinds: transportation, telephone, electricity, modern plumbing, and many others that I had accepted as one accepts each day as it comes, a very natural and expected order of events. Then there was the opportunity of the best in entertainment, social life and many friends and loved ones. All of this had been very dear to me, and here I was on the train, putting mile after mile between me and the things I had felt were so necessary to my happiness and even to my existence.

The train stopped to replenish its water supply, and as I looked out the window, I could see a few dwellings scattered here and there across that vast expanse of nothing called the prairie. Upon closer observation, I noticed a few buildings in a straight line, and this I was told was Main Street of the town. I had no idea that this was a town where we were stopping and thought someone was getting a kick out of my being a tenderfoot and was jesting about

4. This excerpt from Anna Waltz's letter to her daughter Dorothy Waltz Lewis is included as an appendix to the Anna Waltz manuscript.

it. It looked to me like a ranch that I had read about with some separate bunkhouses for the cowboys. This I must remember—any time buildings are in a straight line, it is a town and in front of the line of buildings is Main Street. It could just as well have been called *The* Street as it was the only one to be seen. As to the dwellings, they were what one might call shacks huddled close to the ground as if they were holding tight to mother earth for protection from the elements. Yet, curiously enough, the little Main Street structures were built with a false front to make them look higher and more pretentious, I suppose, although the significance of the idea escaped me and still does.

I wondered, Will the place where I am going be like this? I had a rather sickish feeling about continuing the journey, but I had determined to make the best of the situation and decided long ago that I could and would learn to love this place and the people with whom we were to labor. I had many misgivings as I rode along seeing nothing but sky and land as far as I looked in any direction, hardly even conscious of the speed of the train since we passed so little to compare it to. Miles and miles of cactus and tumbleweed with an occasional prairie-dog village where fat little prairie dogs relieved the monotony of the landscape by heaping little mounds of dirt at the front doors of their homes. The prairie grass swaying in the wind seemed to be waving especially to me and beckoning me on to the strange abode and new experiences in the days ahead.

My husband had preceded me by many months, going ahead to pave the way and to get things in condition to ease the jolt he was sure I might get from the newness and crudeness of this prairie country.[5]

The train finally rounded a curve and the conductor called my stop. This is Burke, I said to myself. This is it—where I jump off. And I pushed my face against the window to get a glimpse of the town which would soon become a metropolis to me, where I would come to do my trading and to see a train if I ever forgot what one looked like. My impression was the same as it was where we had stopped for water. How on earth, I thought, could anyone call this a town? I gathered my baggage and a few bundles together and a

5. A. Pierce Waltz came to Burke in 1910, a year ahead of Anna. They were not yet married, however, and did not get married until 28 June 1911, when Pierce went east to Philadelphia. From his memoir, "This is My Life," p. 18, it appears that he and his bride actually took this train ride to Burke together. To provide a more dramatic opening segment, Anna writes the scene as if she were alone.

great lump came in my throat. For some strange reason I couldn't see things very clearly and I had to pinch myself to realize that I had any feeling left. I just felt numb all over. How can I actually live in this wild and lonely looking country? The brakes of the train squeaked. I got up from the seat and we came to a sudden stop that threw me back in the seat with such force that it made me wish I could just keep right on sinking down, down somewhere—perhaps to China—or far enough so that I would wake up from this fantastic dream. The conductor came to my assistance and helped me with my luggage. On the way to the door he said with a big smile, "Comin' home and glad to get here, huh?" I looked at him stupidly and with what little energy and breath I had left answered a feeble, "Yes."

At that moment, it was not strictly the truth, but it became truer when I was out of the train and in my husband's arms and the others at the station were greeting me. These were friends of my husband's, friends he had made since coming here. They were offering their friendship to me in their kindly manner, completely devoid of artificiality and pretense. Just plain people, western people chuck full of friendliness for anyone who would accept them as they were.

Anna Langhorne Waltz, a native of Philadelphia, recalled that with her first glimpse of Burke, South Dakota, "a great lump came in my throat."

Anna and Reverend Waltz's first house in Burke had two rooms and a false front.

I had expected to continue the journey by wagon, but as a surprise my husband had bought two bronco ponies and a top buggy so we went the remainder of the way in style, if that is what you can call bumping along for thirty miles over the Indian trails of the prairie.[6]

Just as the sun was sinking beyond the horizon, we arrived in "our" town. *Town* did I say? Well, if I thought the other places were hardly worthy of that name, I'm sure I couldn't describe what I thought of this place. Was it because the sunset was so bright that I squinted my eyes too tight, or was it because I was

6. This journey across the prairie is a bit of fiction. The Chicago & North Western Railroad built a line through Burke in 1907, and Pierce Waltz mentions in his memoirs (p. 16) that he took the train to Burke when beginning his missionary work in 1910. Anna herself states that the railroad came to Burke. Although Pierce also served a parish in Lucas, twelve miles to the north, the couple actually lived in Burke. Dorothy Waltz Lewis speculates that her mother "felt she should fictionalize some things to make it more like a story." She may also have been attempting to put some protective distance between her memoir and the real town and people. In any case, the following description of "our" town undoubtedly includes Anna's first impressions of both Burke and Lucas, but the house described is Pierce's bachelor quarters in Burke, where the young couple spent their first months of married life.

trying to see a town by looking in the wrong direction? I must suddenly have acquired a blind spot. But I knew, I really knew that this was all there was, that this was my beginning on the lonely, lonely prairie with the sky that seemed almost too big to fit over it. Since we could take in the whole town at a glance, we were soon in front of the place where we were to live. Was it a store, was it a house—what was it? My heart almost failed me. Here was just about the exact replica of the little shacks I had seen from the train window and thought were so quaint. But this was one of distinction—it had a false height.

There was the front step, which was made in the form of a small platform, not connected to the house and not anchored any too well. Now, if you didn't step on it at the right angle, it would overbalance and pitch you off. Because of the excitement of the occasion, my husband failed to inform me of this, so immediately I stepped too near one end and the other came up to greet me. Had it not been for the quick aid of my husband, I would have landed in the dirt and dust at the side. Fortunately, I was not given this last straw of dust and humiliation to bear. At last my husband got the door open and with a big grin welcomed me to our new home. As I stepped inside, I really marveled at the ingenuity he had displayed in fixing up this place. It did look homey even with the old drum coal stove in the middle of the room. The little shack had just two rooms—front and back. The front room was living room, study, parlor, library and any other kind of room that you might need at the moment. It had a desk, a few chairs, a homemade bookcase built up against the wall and then our big round fat stove, which we treated with awe and deference since he must always come through when the thermometer went down to forty below.

The other room was the bedroom with a bed and a closet with a curtain around a post for a partition, a chair and a bench. On the bench was a bucket of water, a dipper and a wash basin—oh, yes—a tiny mirror was hung over the bench, I suppose so you could see where you began to wash and where you left off.

There was no provision for anything like a kitchen because my husband had taken his meals out at different places, so until we could fix up some arrangement for cooking, we ate at a place called a hotel where traders would "put up" in an emergency. It would have to be a real emergency, I thought to myself, but I came to appreciate it later. The hotel came in mighty handy since we had no plumbing in the house. That trail down to the hotel and out to the little house in back became mighty familiar to us. This

arrangement was adequate in the mild weather, but when the thermometer dropped way down below zero—well, that was a different matter. And when we carried our water up from their well, we had ice water with no trouble at all. In time, after a lot of fixing, we had things arranged so we could cook, and it seemed more like home even though everything was so different.[7]

I had never lived in the country and seldom went there because the vacations we did have were mostly spent at the seashore. The jump from one of the largest eastern cities to this environment was a very difficult change. One thing I missed was trees. There were no trees in this place, only grass—mostly the short brown buffalo grass—and the tumbleweed forever rolling in the wind. There was nothing to break your gaze—the ground just went on and on and on and so did the sky.

The people impressed me quite favorably—there was such a wholesomeness about them. As in every place one goes, there are the good, bad and indifferent, but here there were so many of the good kind. There were those who were cultured, who had come out here for various reasons, some for health and some to get away from too much conventionality and the strain of living. There were a few with several college degrees and others with only a primary education. Those talented in music were always ready to render this service to make things pleasant. Others with different talents, even though they knew their limitations as far as talent was concerned, were willing to contribute what they had for the pleasure and contentment of others. In the East where I had come from, as I observed it and from my own experience there, there did exist a class distinction. One sought out their own type to form their friendships. But out here in this prairie community we were all one in the common cause of life, for we had to depend so much on each other. As far as the population in this little town was concerned, we all lived on the right side of the tracks no matter where they were located. I grew to love these people who had such a spirit of oneness that when anyone was in trouble or in sorrow, each one felt as if it was his own and contributed everything in his power to ease the situation. They never questioned, Who is my neighbor?, because that included anyone near or far who needed help.

I recall one instance when a knock came on the door at one o'clock in the morning. When my husband opened the door, there

7. Although Anna does not record the event, she and Pierce eventually moved from his bachelor quarters to a new parsonage.

stood a man who said his neighbor's daughter was dying and she wanted my husband to come and be with her when she went. It had stopped snowing, but the snow was piled several feet high and the thermometer had fallen to thirty degrees below zero. My husband dressed immediately as warmly as he could and started out with this man on a trip of sixteen miles across the prairie in an open wagon. The wind was blowing a terrific gale, and any amount of clothing would seem almost like tissue paper in a wind like that. Both men had on fur caps pulled down over their heads and ears and a woolen scarf tied over their faces. They took turns driving the horses—one would drive while the other would jump around in the wagon and beat his arms around his body to keep up the circulation. Then they would change over. It was a very dangerous trip, for had they gotten off the trails and been lost, they never could have survived such a night. They arrived at the homestead and the mother said that the daughter seemed determined to hold on to life until my husband got there. She was just a young girl about fourteen. When my husband went over to the bed, she couldn't talk, but she looked up at him and smiled and put out her hand and closed her eyes. My husband held her hand in his, and in less than ten minutes she was sleeping the eternal sleep. My husband returned home the next morning, the same man bringing him home who had come for him. This man had been stranded at the home of the sick girl for several days because of the snow and cold, but when he heard her request, he had driven out to fulfill it.

Since automobiles were practically nonexistent in this part of the country, our only means of transportation was our top buggy and the two bronco ponies. Our field comprised a large territory of about a fifty-mile radius, so we had many friends scattered over many miles of the prairie. To keep up our work and do the visiting that was required of us, we were away from home and driving over the prairies a good deal of the time.

The wind blows and blows in this country of space. One day I was alone and sitting by the window looking toward Main Street (our shack was located at the end of one of the few mud streets of the town—there were only three besides Main). The wind was blowing as usual when suddenly a terrible gale started and almost everything loose around town was playing tag down the center of Main Street: empty tin cans, boxes, scraps of paper chasing each other high up in the air and flopping down again. The dirt and dust and tiny pebbles were being hammered against the houses like a regular hail storm. The atmosphere was thick

with so many things flying around in dirt and muck. Suddenly before my eyes a large two-seated buggy belonging to our neighbors down the road was picked up by the wind, hurled up in the air, turned over several times, blown around like a piece of straw, and set right back where it had been, only this time it was wrong side up. The top had been completely demolished, and it was a wonder that anything was left but splinters. I was so frightened I wanted to run and hide, but there was no place to go, so I moved away from the window expecting that at any minute it would be smashed in. In a few minutes the wind had subsided, but I was still trembling from the shock.

This wind—it blows and whines and howls until at times it seems almost unbearable. In fact many people have moved away because they couldn't stand the wind any longer. This wind is not a soft zephyr that one can enjoy, but plain unadulterated hard wind. If there were only some trees to break its force, it might not lash so furiously. But perhaps that is what makes this place such a healthy place to live in. The wind blows away all the germs, but in doing so blows almost everything else away with it —people included.

There are different kinds of winds—hot winds and cold winds. One day during our first summer in this country, my husband came rushing into the house and said, "You better not go out of the house today. There is a hot wind blowing." That was news to me, for I had never heard of a hot wind before. I knew that it was very hot and that the wind was blowing as usual but wondered why he called it a hot wind. He told me that if I so much as opened the door at this time I would find out why. It was then that I noticed his face was very red and thought perhaps he was overly warm from being out on such a hot day. He went into the bedroom to wash his face in cool water, and while he was out of the room I thought I would convince myself that it was not a hot wind. So I quietly opened the front door and went out. I had gone only a short distance from the door, about six feet or so, when I was hit in the face with such a terrific gust of heat that I thought I was on fire. I covered my face with my hands and ran back in the house as quickly as I could. In that short time my face was burned red. When my husband came in from the bedroom, he was convulsed with laughter when he saw my face. He didn't say "I told you so" but just stood there and laughed and wanted to know why I was blushing such a deep red. I told him for the same reason that he was.

No one was out that day until the sun went down, and when it did go down it was a sorry sight to see the grass and the little

shrubbery that a few folks had been brave enough to plant burned almost to a crisp. There was nothing green after that for the remainder of the summer.[8] So I found out that there was such a thing as a hot wind by experiencing the discomfort of sunburn and of having to put cream on my face in the very hot weather and feeling like a piece of side bacon being rendered out.

We had to keep all windows and doors tightly shut during these hot winds and try to keep out the intense heat and in the

As the only Protestant minister within a fifty-mile radius of Burke, Reverend Waltz made pastoral calls on horseback or by buggy.

meantime felt like we were suffocating. On these hot wind days how we would all long for the night to come to give us relief from the torturing heat of the sun and wind. These winds did not come often, but when they did come, they would last from about ten or eleven o'clock in the morning until the sun went down, and from two to three days. Even this long seemed like two or three years.

8. After several years of abnormally high rainfall, severe drought struck western South Dakota in 1910 and 1911, forcing thousands of disillusioned homesteaders to leave the region.

Even now when we talk of the hot winds, it makes my face feel hot and burnt.

Then, from one extreme to the other, the cold winds blow, too. It was during the first part of January during our first winter on the prairie that I wanted to get some things at the trading post. I knew it was a very cold day but thought that by bundling up well I could make it. My husband had been down earlier in the day to get the mail, and when he returned he mentioned how cold it was and that it was getting colder every minute. He warned me about going out in it, but I am one who likes to test things for myself. So I put on my warmest clothing and over all a big heavy coat and around my head a woolen scarf. I felt quite secure and snug when I started out. I had not gone very far when I realized how bitterly cold it really was. The wind, as usual, was blowing the cold right through all my heavy clothing. I felt like I had been dashed into a tub of ice water. Before I got very far, my eyes were frozen over and it was impossible for me to see where I was going. I stood still and held my big old fur muff up to my eyes to thaw them out, but in doing so it seemed to make more moisture, and when I took the muff down, they froze even more. So, defeated, I decided to turn back and go home. Going towards the store I had my back to the wind, but when I turned around I had to battle against it, and with every breath it was real suffering. I felt as if I were swallowing sharp pointed daggers that were stabbing my lungs. My very breath had frozen on my face and icicles were hanging from my nose and eyes. It was surprising what a short distance I had gone and what a long time it seemed to have taken. When I reached our shack, I fairly fell through the door. My husband came to my rescue just as I collapsed. He carried me to the bed and took off my boots and wraps and gave me a good massage. He heated some water and brought a bucket and kept pouring the warm water over my legs and feet. I got into bed between soft downy blankets and I can never describe the feeling of thankfulness and satisfaction in being truly warm again. The old shack with its coal stove seemed like a palace. And so I learned about the cold winds.

Camping Out

Summer again and we are looking forward to a fishing trip. Two old-timers—a young couple in their late twenties who have spent all their lives out in this country—have invited us to go

with them on a camping and fishing trip on an island in the Missouri River. The woman was born out here on a cattle ranch miles from any town or railroad. They would get to town about twice a year for supplies and go practically no place else in between these trips. The young husband had worked on a cattle ranch all his life and mostly for his father-in-law. They had two tiny children, one about three and the other about two years of age. These two little ones were to go with us on this trip. I gasped when she said they were taking the babies, but she informed me that they were tough and used to hardships, and I am quite sure they were, knowing these folks as we did and realizing they could endure almost anything along the line of discomfort. I almost backed out when the time came to go, and had I known what I knew later, I most certainly never would have gone.

They told us we wouldn't have to sleep out in the open as there was an old abandoned cabin on the island that had been built years ago by an old lumberjack and fisherman who had disappeared, no one knew where. Some thought he had died and the wolves had devoured the body. Others thought he had drowned during a flood season some years ago. But no one could escape the fact that he was gone and had been gone for a long time. As far as anyone else knew, no one ever went to this island anymore except this native couple, and they hadn't been there for a number of years. There were many stories about things that happened to some who had gone there years before. Most of these people were supposed to have disappeared for some mysterious reason or by drowning or at the hands of a stray band of Indians. I asked if there were any wild animals on this island, and they said, yes, there had been wolves and wildcats, but they doubted if there were any there now.

The morning we were to go dawned bright and clear. Very early before the sun appeared, my husband went out to get our ponies and discovered that even though he had hobbled them the night before, they had gone quite a distance away. Was this an omen? He brought them back and harnessed them to the buggy, and when we had packed some food and extra clothing, we were ready to start. We had a piece of white cloth tied to the end of a stick, which was to be used as a signal. There were no regular roads, only trails, and no fences of any kind where one could tie a white rag, hence the stick—a piece of old discarded lumber that had been hauled miles to build some of the shacks. If we arrived at the place where we were to meet before they did, we were to plant the stick with the white rag at the third turn of the trail and

continue down through the cliffs to the banks of the river, and they were to do the same if they arrived first. We were not at all familiar with the trail that wound for miles among the cliffs down to the riverbank, so I was very anxious to get an early start, get to the meeting place first, and wait right there until the others came. We weren't easy about continuing to the river without someone who knew the way. Our trip before we arrived at the meeting place was quite uneventful like most of our trips across the boundless prairie. All one could do was to follow the trail. There was no use going off the trail very far because in the first place there was no place to go, and once off the trail everything looks the same and is so confusing that one is easily lost. The sun beat down as usual on the treeless prairie, and the wind flapped the side and back curtains of the buggy making a weird staccato sound like the beating of a drum. We finally arrived at the designated place to meet, and I surely heaved a sigh of relief when I discovered there was no white rag on a stick ahead of us. If you want to know what the feeling of nothing is, go to the third turn in an old Indian trail that winds down through the breaks or cliffs to the old Missouri River. Stand there and look in every direction, then look up and then down—you know the earth is under your feet and the sky is above, but aside from them, there is not another thing visible. At times you even doubt that the earth and sky really exist. The feeling of nothingness simply envelopes you.

We had no idea how long we would have to wait so turned our buggy against the sun so we could enjoy a little shade. We had been there about ten minutes when far off toward the western horizon we could see a cloud of dust. It couldn't be anyone else but our fellow campers, but as it got nearer and the cloud of dust got bigger, I began to wonder if they had Indians trailing them. I never saw a wagon kick up so much dust. Finally with a whoop and a bang and a great rattle and noise, the new arrivals pulled rein right in front of our ponies. Our ponies, being rather nervous and skittish, reared up on their hind legs, and I had visions of complete chaos when at last my husband got them down and somewhat calmed. When I got a glimpse of the rig our companions came in, I burst out laughing. The wagon was loose in all its joints, and the harness looked as if it had been thrown at the horses and landed where it could—everything was loose and rattly. I soon discovered what made the cloud of dust. Tied loosely and dragging behind the wagon was a large wire thing that they said was a fishnet. The whole picture was the most ridiculous-looking spectacle I had ever seen, but I was afraid if I laughed

much more they might be insulted. But the laughter being repressed would gather force inside and all at once burst out beyond my control again. Finally I gasped to a stop and asked where the babies were. They were on the floor of the wagon asleep! With all that noise and clatter and bumping over the trail, they were asleep! They were real prairie kids and tough enough to endure almost anything, and I wouldn't have to worry about them. We got out of the buggy and went to look at the children. The parents had spread an old quilt out in the bottom of the wagon, and the children looked as if they had been scrambled. One's head was in one direction, and the other was completely turned around and almost upside down, and still they slept. My husband is one who displays complete control over his emotions and is not as spontaneous as I, but this was too much for him and he started laughing, and finally we were all helplessly laughing—the parents being able to see the humor as well as we.

They knew the direction we were to take, so they naturally would lead. I had visions of what we would look like after fifteen or twenty miles of riding behind that wagon with the wire fishnet kicking up mountains of dust in our faces, but before I had a chance to say anything, my husband solved the problem by tying the net behind our buggy. At least we would be able to see who was leading.

And so we continued with not only the sound of a drum from the buggy's curtains but with a whole band entirely out of harmony clanging along in back. By the time we had reached the cliffs, I was entirely oblivious to the noise, having had it in my ears for nearly twenty miles of bumpy riding.

We started to slacken our pace now because we were going down through the cliffs, and the hills were so steep it was all the ponies and horses could do to hold back the vehicles. I was sure that old wire net would come tumbling over the top of the buggy; it kept bumping and banging worse than ever at every steep grade. I couldn't help wishing it would break loose and roll away over one of the cliffs, but it hung right on to the last of the journey. We came to the banks of the old "Big Muddy," and I was looking for a bridge over which we could cross to the island. Not seeing any, I asked how we were to get over to it and the reply came, "Ford the river." I could see the island in the distance, and it looked like it was too far away to even consider driving through the river to get there. I thought, No wonder folks going to this island disappear and are never heard of again. Out from the shore of the Missouri, I knew there were quicksand bars in some places,

and I thought, What if we should get stuck in quicksand? We could be among those who disappeared. I kept thinking of all the things that I had done that I shouldn't and the things I should have done that I didn't, just like they say a person does when he is drowning—and here I was not even to the water yet.

The men unfastened that big clumsy net from our buggy and tied it on the back of the wagon again. The horses pulling the wagon were big strapping workhorses and could plow through almost anything, so down the bank they started right for the river. I held my breath when they pulled the wagon down in the water after them. It seemed like it would surely fall to pieces now. Once in the river there was not so much noise, only the clanking of the harness and the splashing of the water. I asked my husband to wait and see if they could make it to the island without any mishap, but he said that the island was too far away and that we must follow them closely because they were familiar with the course we should take. So down in the water we drove with our two little broncos looking like a pair of prairie dogs in comparison to the big horses ahead. I don't think they liked it any more than I did because Babe gave a loud whinny and Bill an honest-to-goodness snort as if he were cross about the whole thing. And this was all I needed, as I had heard that horses were very keen about any danger and I was sure that they were trying to tell us that all was not well. The muddy water swirled all about them and was up to their bellies. It came over the floor of the buggy, and I was sure we were sinking. I wanted to turn back, but my husband said it would be more dangerous to turn around and take the risk of being turned over by the swift current than it was to keep going. Just then one of the big horses ahead stumbled and almost jerked the driver from the wagon. I let out a scream, and the woman ahead turned around and waved at me and started to laugh. I said to my husband, "I certainly wouldn't have laughed if that had been you." In reply he said, "Oh, she has been here before and trusts her husband." Well, that finished the conversation. I was flattened. I trusted my husband too, but I certainly didn't trust rivers running through the buggy floor and over my feet. I closed my eyes to keep from seeing the water rushing past, as it made me feel so dizzy, and resigned myself to anything that might happen.

I felt an extra tug by the ponies and opened my eyes to see the wagon already on the shore of the island and our ponies struggling up the slippery, muddy bank to join them.

So this was the island. Six hundred acres of heavily wooded land. Trees at last! Could it be possible that I was really seeing a

Anna Waltz stands next to the buggy that she and her husband drove on their travels across the plains.

tree once more? There were cottonwoods, pine, willows and a few birch. I was so happy to see them; the first thing I did when I got out of the buggy was to run up to the first big old cottonwood tree in my path and put my arms around it. In fact, there were so many trees and so much underbrush that it was really a forest and very difficult to penetrate, we discovered, when we tried to find the old abandoned cabin. It was impossible to drive the buggy and wagon through this tangle, so the horses were unhitched and the wagon and buggy left in a small clearing while we started out on horseback to find our campsite. The two little girls were awakened and one put astride the horse the mother was on and the other on the father's horse. They said the cabin was quite a distance from the shore, so we rode for some time through the jungle with low branches of the trees snapping across our faces,

pulling our hair, and the thick underbrush tearing our clothing. After what seemed like ages, the men spied the weather-worn roof jutting out above some low trees, and we made our way to it. So this was the cabin! There were no windows, just sagging frames, and the tiny front stoop was rotted through. There was no door but a zigzag screen-door frame that was hanging halfway in and halfway out, the screening at the bottom entirely gone and the top hanging in brown threads ready to fall any minute. It looked as if every nail in the place had rusted through and had given up the struggle to hold things together. The whole structure from the outside looked like it might be ready to give itself over to complete abandonment and collapse. The men went in first and we followed.

There were two rooms with one window in each, but the place was very dark even with the door off and the sun shining brightly. The floor seemed sturdy enough to hold us but was covered with dirt, and cobwebs were hanging thick from every direction. There was nothing in this room, but in the back room there was an old iron cookstove covered with rust and minus two legs, with logs poked under it to hold it up. Since we had no broom, our companions went outside and came back dragging pine branches, which they used to sweep up the dust and cobwebs. The men made several trips back to the wagon and buggy to bring the necessary food and bedding. We discovered there was no stovepipe attached to the chimney, so the men decided to carry the stove outside. They took off the remaining legs and built a fire in it so we could cook supper. While we women got supper, the men went down to the riverbank to set the net and anchor the lines so we could have fish for breakfast.

After we ate, we all gathered more pine branches and spread them across the front room from the window to the door (the window and door being directly opposite from each other). A large tarpaulin was spread over this, then most of the bedding and pillows put on top of the tarp. It really made a very nice bed, and the pine was very fragrant. I was to occupy the space next to the window, my husband next, Mr. Sage next, then the babies, and then their mother. We fastened a thin piece of cloth against the lower part of the window because it was only a foot from the ground outside and I had to sleep close to it. There was nothing done about the door—not even a quilt hung up. The children were sleepy again so were put to bed on the pine branches and slept all night, which is more than I could say about the rest of us.

It was a very dark night, and the little old oil lantern didn't give us much light, so we went outside and built a big fire of pine

branches and dried cottonwood sticks. It was growing late, and as we sat around the fire watching the dying embers, there came a most prolonged, uncanny scream from a tree close-by. We all jumped, and Mr. Sage grabbed his gun, which was lying on the ground close-by, and shot several times. "Wildcat," he said. I could hardly get to my feet I was trembling so, but I did manage to get inside the cabin. I was so frightened I wanted to sit up the rest of the night, but Mr. Sage said that a wildcat was afraid of the noise of a gun and wouldn't come back that night, which was the reason that he shot several times. He promised me that he would keep the gun close to him all night. We all crawled into bed, and in a short time I heard the others breathing heavily and knew they were all sound asleep, but there was no sleep for me. I kept imagining all sorts of things: about the man who had built this cabin in such a desolate spot and his mysterious disappearance, about the disappearance of others who had come here, about the wildcat coming back and perhaps other wildcats coming, too. I had a long struggle with myself and was finally just about overcome with drowsiness when I heard a low growl and scratching right by the window where I was sleeping. I knew that the thin cloth at the window was no protection; I tried to scream, but no sound would come; I couldn't even move to waken my husband who was sleeping right beside me. There was more growling and snarling, and then I heard the animal slinking around the cabin toward the doorway where there was no door. I heard the horses stamping and neighing, and I knew this was not my imagination. With all the others sound asleep, I either had to start moving, or we would all be in a fix. I jabbed my husband's side, and he awoke with a start. All I could say was, "Wildcat!" He thought I was dreaming and didn't pay much attention except to tell me to go to sleep. He turned over and started to doze off, when I looked at the doorway and saw a pair of fiery eyes. I mustered all the strength I could and yelled with all my might, "Wildcat!" With that the animal let out that terrible agonizing scream we had heard earlier in the night. By this time Mr. Sage had grabbed his gun and shot toward the door. We could hear the creature jump through the underbrush still screaming. Now everyone got up and lighted the lantern and sat around talking. My job being done, I closed my eyes and slept like a log until the sun came up.

When we went out that morning to make the fire to get breakfast, we saw the claw marks on the wood at the window and the tracks around the cabin right up to the door.

The men took the horses down to the river to water and to see if any fish had been caught during the night. The net had been

disturbed and the poles knocked over, so they came back with the net and poles and no fish for breakfast. During breakfast, I noticed the men were unusually quiet, and Mr. Sage kept his gun close to him. I thought, Surely they don't care that much about not catching any fish. After we had eaten, Mr. Sage said that we should hurry and get all our things packed and over to the buggy and the wagon as soon as possible. He said it in a jerky, hurried way, so neither his wife nor I asked any questions at the time but followed our orders. I thought it was very strange because we were to have stayed here several days. But whatever it was that led him to that decision, I didn't care for I was glad to know we were leaving. In time, my curiosity got the best of me, and I asked my husband what was wrong. He said he would tell me when we got to the opposite shore away from the island.

While climbing the trail up through the cliffs on the other side, I didn't know whether to ask or not, but by this time I was more curious. Then my husband told me that when they took the horses to the water just before breakfast, they had discovered animal tracks that were the tracks of either a large gray wolf or a panther. They weren't sure but thought it best and safest to leave the island as soon as we could. What a relief to hear it on this side of the river away from the island! I was truly thankful they had not told us before and think they used splendid judgement. I took one look back and said goodbye to the trees, wishing that I could take some with me. But we were now at the top of the cliffs and starting across the prairie. No lurking behind trees and bushes here—everything was out in the open. We came to the parting of the ways and bade farewell to our friends, and all felt rather solemn about getting away from the island without any mishap. It was a trip of thrills, but we were glad that we had cheated the island of another mysterious disappearance.

Church and Community

Our leisure moments were very few for the work was so great. Besides serving two village churches as regular pastor, there were two mission stations where my husband would preach on alternate weeks. These services were held in schoolhouses, and there was always a crowd large enough to fill all seating and standing capacity. The homesteaders came from near and far to both these schoolhouses eager and anxious to hear the gospel

message. Some came in wagons and some on horseback. All the men were dressed in overalls and the women in clean house-dresses, some even wearing a clean apron over their dresses. These meetings were indeed bright spots in their lonely monotonous prairie life, and they joined in the service and the singing with a reverent heartiness that was most gratifying. I remember one big, rough-looking man who was always at the meeting at the north schoolhouse. He would linger after most of the folks had gone but would never talk much. He seemed to just want to be near my husband. One evening after all the folks had gone, my husband and I were busy gathering up some songbooks when he appeared in the doorway of the schoolhouse. My husband had had many talks with him about becoming a Christian, but he would never say more than, "Yes, I know I should" or "I wish I could." We talked to him a long time and prayed with him but did not get any definite response. Finally we gathered up our music, took our lantern from the wall, and we all went outside. We said goodnight and hoped he would be there for the next meeting. He said, "Yes," and that was all.

In two weeks we drove out to that north schoolhouse again for a service. When we walked in the room, there was "Stark," as he was called, sitting on the back seat as usual—the first to arrive. Soon others came and the room was full. After the worship period of prayer and song, the gospel message was given from the Bible—a vital, heart-stirring message. Just before the closing prayer, there was an opportunity given to anyone who wished to offer prayer. There was a deep silence for a short time, then someone in the back of the house stood up, and we heard these words in the voice of big rough Stark, trembling a great deal, saying, "Oh, God bless the whole sheebang!" That was all, not even an amen, but oh, how much was revealed in those few words spoken to God in a real heartfelt prayer. A big rough man praying for all of us in the language that was familiar to him. One might think that this would perhaps cause a smile with some, but it did not. The deep struggle and the sincerity of talking to God in this humble prayer by a man who otherwise was a very silent person produced a feeling of how unworthy, after all, we are of God's blessings. It stirred my very soul as it did many of those present, and I am sure the influence of that short humble prayer will go on and on to eternity. There were many more prayers, but I have always remembered the exact words of this particular one.

There were many funny things that happened, too, to add a little spice to the joy of living, to temper and smooth out some of the rough places—just to laugh! Good clean humor, in the midst of so

much gloom, is so refreshing. And God has given to man the sense and ability to laugh, which He has not given to any other created thing. Let us make the most of it and benefit from this God-given talent.

The night we were to go to the west schoolhouse was a beautiful one, so we started early and let the ponies meander along the trail while we watched the gorgeous sunset. After we arrived, a wagon drove up with a large family of children in it. They came into the schoolhouse and finally got settled in seats and benches, the mother holding the two-month-old baby on her lap. She was a very stout young woman, and during the meeting the baby girl kept sliding off her lap until, after rolling off the tenth time, she rolled under one of the benches. Her mother finally leaned over and tucked the blanket a little more securely around her, then sat back on the seat and let her stay there until the meeting was over. Horrors! I was tempted to rescue the baby from the floor, but decided I'd better not interfere. I suppose this sort of bring-

The Baptist church in Burke (center) was built while the Waltzes were there, and the couple eventually moved into the new parsonage at left. The Catholic church appears at far right.

ing up makes them the hardy stock most of them are. Afterward, I could see the funny side, visualizing the mother's scant lap as a splendid toboggan slide for the baby. Perhaps she was used to it and didn't mind; could it be the baby enjoyed it?

Then there was the mother with the Christmas babies! They had seven small children, and the mother told me that five of them had been born (in different years, of course) on Christmas day. Well, they were pretty sure of at least one wonderful Christmas present!

One day we were asked by the father to come to this "Christmas Baby" home for dinner. Plans are usually made a long time ahead, so about a month later we were on our way. My husband and I had decided that if at all possible, we would always go to any home, no matter how far or how hard it was to get there. This homestead was far to the northwest beyond the Dark Canyon, and the trails were almost impassable because of a recent cloudburst; but we had given our promise so would put forth every effort to keep it.

Knowing we had a long distance to travel, we started out early. The going was not so bad while we were on the prairie trail, but when we reached the canyon, we could not distinguish anything that bore any resemblance to a trail. We were miles from anywhere and felt that we were at the end of nowhere. One look down in the Dark Canyon and it was enough to make anyone turn back. The cloudburst had created a dashing, whirling stream at the bottom, and there was no other way to get to the homestead except to cross this canyon. My husband looked at me and I at him with that questioning look that said, Shall we try it or turn back? How could we go back when we knew these lonely people were expecting us and had been looking forward to our visit for a long time?

Fortunately, it was summer and the day was clear and very warm. If we should get wet it wouldn't hurt us, but how deep was the water, and how would our broncos act about crossing? These questions were puzzling us. We had stopped at the rim of the canyon and were sitting there debating what decision to make when suddenly there came a call from the other side. We heard the voice but could not catch what was being said, nor could we recognize the person because of the distance. We could make out the form of a man waving to us and motioning us to come on over. Then, by signals of white and red rags, he showed us how we could cross with the least danger.

When we were going the right way, he would wave the white rag; but as soon as we were a little off the course, he would wave

the red rag frantically in the direction we should go. He knew what damage the cloudburst had made so had gone over the trail through the water at the bottom of the canyon to search out the safest way to cross. With all this maneuvering, we finally got down to the bottom of the canyon and the newly made stream. These canyon streams are very tricky places to cross, especially the ones made from recent rains where one is not sure of the depth of the water nor the lay of the ground underneath. The person who was trying to guide us pointed to a place a short distance down the stream, so we made our way carefully to that place and crossed in shallow water. When we reached the rim on the other side, we recognized our guide as the man who had invited us to his home.

We then proceeded over the rocks and underbrush until we reached their place a few miles farther away. Such a desolate place to live! How happy the mother was to see me—she cried on my shoulder and said she had not seen another woman for weeks and weeks. My heart ached in sympathy for her as I thought of the lonely weeks and months she spent in this far-away place with no mail, no telephone, no way of communicating with the outside world except by weary miles of travel by wagon or horseback.

With the husband it was somewhat different. He could jump on a horse and get somewhere, even if it were only a bachelor's ranch five or ten miles away down through the canyon. But this dear woman with the family of little children to care for was truly isolated. What a task it must be to get them all ready to even try to go anywhere in the wagon. It was, indeed, a very lowly home, but she did the very best she could to have a nice dinner for us, and we did appreciate it. How happy we were that we had not turned back and that we had brought a little sunshine and cheer into the life of these truly deserving, humble people.

I dreaded the trip back but would never let them know. We followed as closely as we could the way we had come and came out of the canyon on the other side in fine shape.

I was beginning to feel that I was a part of this western country and truly belonged here, and was growing to tolerate and even enjoy many of the things I at first thought were so strange and almost unendurable. Time has a way of molding us into a pattern whereby we can fit into different surroundings and learn to love them if we but try and are interested in others. Ours was a busy life. Besides our religious activities and responsibilities of trying to care for a territory of a fifty-mile radius, there were many calls to help in other ways.

Reverend Waltz also served the congregation that built this church in Lucas, twelve miles north of Burke.

One morning there came a knock on our door, and a homesteader from up near the Missouri bluffs, miles away to the northwest, asked my husband if he could come up to their sod schoolhouse. They were having a community sing and get-together and wanted my husband to help with the singing and give them a "good talk" (meaning a religious message). He informed us that there would be arrangements made for us to stay all night because it would be impossible for us to return home that same night. Of course we accepted the invitation and were willing to help in any way to make it a successful evening.

Early in the afternoon on the day of this get-together, my husband hitched the ponies to our top buggy, and off we started for our new experience. When we arrived, some of the folks were already there. Just as we were getting out of our buggy, a big wagon full of homesteaders came from the north. It was loaded almost beyond capacity, with two of the men riding on the horses that pulled the wagon, making use of every available space. How

many were in the wagon I do not know, but I do know they had a rocking chair in it with a grandmother sitting and holding a baby. They unloaded and the rocking chair was carried inside the schoolhouse and grandmother went on rocking the baby. In time, when the baby went to sleep, it was carried out and put on some blankets in the bottom of the wagon for the remainder of the evening.

Another big wagon drove up, and such a commotion! There was a rattling, banging and crashing, which I found out later was large milk cans filled with water. Some of the men had gone to the river and filled the cans with water so that during the evening we could all have a drink when we became thirsty. This water was very precious, therefore few drops were wasted. When one couldn't finish what he had in the dipper, he passed it on to someone else who would finish it. As usual, I had our own cups in a bag in the buggy so it worked out beautifully.

I saw one man standing apart from the others and went over to greet him. There was a reason for his aloofness. In bringing the water from the river, one large can had upset right where he was, and he was standing away from the crowd so he could dry out. I went over to a group of women and discovered that the women had baked and brought cakes, so we were to have refreshments—cake and water! There was no stove where one could heat water for making coffee, and building an open fire out here was risky—hence the water instead of coffee.

It was time to begin but not everyone could get inside, so a goodly number had to stay outside and listen through the windows and door. Each family brought a lantern, so there was plenty of light inside and out. We sang a few hymns, and then came the "good talk" of the evening with very earnest listeners. Now came the time for the "sing" with my husband leading and I at the old wheezy organ with one pedal. I was grinding out the tunes, but I felt lopsided with only one foot working. Such lusty singing—from "Old Black Joe" and "Swanee River" to "Turkey in the Straw." There was enough volume in that bunch to drown out any instrument or even a band. Did they sing! Even if some were off the key this way or that, it made no difference; it was volume that counted, and we surely got that with a vengeance. They kept wanting to sing so much I thought we would be there all night, and I was afraid I would develop a cramp from using one leg so much. I tried switching to the other foot, but I couldn't play on the bias, so that didn't work. At last I limped away from the organ thinking I would never walk straight again. Where they

ever got that organ, I'm sure I don't know. Someone went "back home" and left it, I suppose.

Refreshments were served—cake and water. By this time the water was warm, but it was wet, and one could eat more cake with water to wash it down, as was demonstrated by many in that crowd. The women had to sample this cake and that cake and pass favorable remarks, of course, and there was a general exchange of recipes. I thought, What little things it takes to make these folks happy out in this desolate country. Contact with others, companionship, singing, some cake and water, and we all had a wonderful evening! Then came the time for separation, each to his own abode.

It was a bright moonlight night and easy to locate your conveyance. We were soon in our buggy and following the wagon in which the people who were to be our hosts for the night were riding. Their homestead was located over in the bluffs, and their shack was built on the ridge of one of the canyons. We couldn't see it until we were right up to it because it blended in with the light and dark shadows of the canyon in the moonlight.

The sod house was built quite low, and we had to duck our heads when we entered the door. There were just two rooms that we could see—the kitchen where we entered and the other room next to the kitchen that was used for the living room, bedroom, and any other room designation one wished to give it. In this room were two double beds besides a few other pieces of furniture. Living here was the father, mother, the son and his wife. I noticed a long wire strung down through the center of the room and a curtain of drapery material bunched together hanging on it at one end. I concluded that this was the removable partition that could be pulled across the center of the room at night, making it into two bedrooms. I was curious to know where we were to sleep since I could see no other room.

We sat around and talked for awhile, then the folks mentioned that we must be tired and ready to go to bed. We agreed that we were tired, so the woman told us our bedroom was upstairs. Upstairs! How could that be? I didn't see where there could be an upstairs in this low building. At first I thought she was fooling and started looking for the stairway. Then, to my surprise, the woman moved the door leading into the kitchen, and back of it, against the wall, were nailed some strips of wood in a ladder fashion leading up to a hole in the ceiling.

Well, that took my breath! I had never climbed a stairway like that, nor anything that looked like it, and was afraid I might make

a misstep and land in a heap on the floor. I gritted my teeth and started. I held on tight and with some boosting from my husband, I made each rung and was finally pushed through the ceiling into the loft above. How fortunate that I was slender or I never would

This photograph of Anna Langhorne was taken at the time of her marriage to A. Pierce Waltz in 1911.

have gone through the hole. I crawled on hands and knees over to the center of the loft, the only place where one could stand up straight, and sat on the edge of the bed. Just then I looked around, and there was my husband's head coming up through the

hole in the floor—coming up inch by inch. How I would have enjoyed throwing pillows at him, but didn't dare. He made it and crawled over to the bed where we both grabbed a pillow and buried our faces in them to smother the sound of our laughter. The only thing in the loft was the bed. We threw our clothing over the beam, put out the lantern, and jumped into bed. We could see the moonlight shining through the cracks of the roof and heard the coyotes howling down in the canyon. But our bed was clean and comfortable, so we were soon fast asleep.

Early in the morning, we were awakened by the tinkle of a lone cowbell. By this we knew the cows had been milked and turned out for the day to eat their fill of the luscious buffalo grass that grows so thick among the prairie grass and contains so much nutrition for cattle. We hurriedly jumped out of bed, put on our clothes, and descended the ladder. No one was in the room when we came down, for which I was very thankful since I missed the last rung and sat flat on the floor. Outside the kitchen door on a wooden shelf, fastened under the one tiny kitchen window, was a bucket of water and a basin where we proceeded to wash before breakfast. In a short time the folks came in from doing the chores, and we had breakfast.

After we had eaten and were ready to leave, we decided to return home a new way over the Bear Gulch trail. This trail led down through the canyon, too, but was even more isolated than the other trail we had used in coming and was much farther. Somehow we got off on the wrong trail and were miles away from where we thought we were. We kept on going, and before long we saw what looked like a private trail not well worn, but we followed it and sure enough, it led us to a dugout where some folks were living. We inquired the way to Bear Gulch trail and discovered we were some miles away from our intended course. It was early evening and the folks invited us to stay to eat. I was anxious to get home and did not care to stay, but my husband thought it a good opportunity to talk to them, so we accepted their invitation.

The family consisted of a man and wife and one grown son. We learned they had lived here many years, raising cattle, and were satisfied with their surroundings and everything in general. There was no floor in this hut, just an earthen one that had been tramped on until it resembled cement. When grease was spilled, or in fact anything else, it simply sunk into the ground and was forgotten.

Several months previous to our arriving at this place, the husband had been to the hospital for an appendectomy. Soon the

meal was ready, cooked as good as she could, I guess, but not very appetizing to me. They didn't seem to be disturbed by the thousands of flies, but I was. Fortunately, I was not very hungry and really didn't care for anything, but to be polite I sat up to the table with the others. While the meal was in progress, the husband had a bright thought that he would show us something we had never seen, as he said. He went to a place that had an old sheet or blanket for a partition or door and pulled it aside and displayed a closet with no window, where all the food was out in plain sight with no covers on anything. From among this conglomeration he brought to the table a quart glass jar, without a lid, explaining that this was his appendix that had been removed from him and that he was keeping it in alcohol in the "pantry," replenishing the alcohol as it evaporated. Bing! My stomach immediately turned a somersault! I excused myself in a hurry, went out the door as quickly as possible, and lost the few bits I had eaten—all because of an appendix in a pantry.

It had been a very hot day, so we waited until some time after the sun had set before resuming our homeward journey. We drove on into the night, with the trail flooded with the moonlight, when some distance toward the west we noticed two men digging in the earth. We drove up to them and stopped the ponies. They told us that their brother had died that morning and they were digging his grave. My husband offered to help them, but they said they were almost through. It had to be dug quite deep because, if it were not, the wolves would dig up the body. It seemed so eerie to be digging a grave in the moonlight, but the day had been too hot to undertake such a strenuous task. We gave them our sympathy, and my husband offered to come out the next day to give the lad a Christian burial. They were glad to have him come. When we reached home, it was long past midnight.

A Trip West

It is strange sometimes the things that occur to change the course of one's life—things that would not enter the wildest dreams. Some of our friends in the village had been talking about the country two or more counties farther west. "A real raw country," they said. I thought, How could it be "rawer" or wilder than this country?, when I remembered that this county had been open

a few years back for settlement, which does make some difference. We all became so enthusiastic about seeing this wilderness that we decided to take a trip out there. This land they talked about had not been opened for the white man to homestead, but a few of them had started a small trading center for the Indians out in Todd County.

At last it simmered down to two men, besides my husband, who could go. These friends had a covered wagon and two big strong horses. We had a small buggy and two bronco ponies. I was rather hesitant about going because I would be the only woman (the other women refused to go out in the "wild" country), but my husband would not go without me, so after much persuasion, I consented to join the party.

We fitted the inside of the wagon with a bed, took a cot, bedding, and provisions enough for ten days. I baked bread, rolls, cakes, and cookies and took jars of jam and canned goods along. Our friends did not know when or where it might be possible for us to get any food on the way, so we were playing safe by taking it with us. Also, large cans of water and thermos jugs were packed in the wagon. We hitched our ponies on either side of the big horses and tied the buggy on behind the wagon because we knew we would return home in different directions.

The first day we did not get very far. In the first place, we did not get started as early as we had expected; then there had been some rain to the west, so the trails were not too good, and the rain had swollen a couple of creeks, making it difficult to cross. The first night we camped by one of the streams. Our friends were so gracious and insisted that my husband and I should occupy the bedroom (the inside of the wagon) and they use the cot on the outside. After all was arranged and fixed for the night, we went to sleep and slept like logs.

In the morning, we woke at the faint gleam of dawn and realized how convenient it was to have a stream close-by where we could take a nice cold—or rather, an ice cold—dip before breakfast. In the wagon we had a tiny folding organ, so after breakfast and after the dishes were washed in the stream, we took out the organ and had our morning devotions. I felt like a real pioneer woman in the covered wagon. All I needed was one of the cute little sunbonnets they used to wear.

We were sorry to leave the creek, for soon we would be entering the wild country where there would be very little but prairie dog villages, rattlesnakes, and the tumbleweed growing thick along the trails. How little I knew that I would see these tumble-

weeds at a different stage in the not-too-distant future. We continued over this lonely, bleak prairie for miles, stopping at noon to feed and rest the horses and get a lunch for ourselves. Then we camped at night just wherever we happened to be. The vastness of this particular part of the prairie fascinated me. To be able to look for miles and miles and not see anything but prairie and sky, with the air so clean, so pure, so exhilarating! There are no twigs nor sticks on the prairie, so at mealtime we pulled prairie grass and wound it into tight wads to make a fire to cook our meals and heat water. The men dug a deep hole for the fireplace as a safety measure. Over the fire and down in the hole we put an iron grate. After we were through with the fire, the men would pound it out with the spade and entirely cover it with dirt. We could not spare one drop of our precious water.

Farther on, we arrived at White River[9] and found the Indians were having a celebration of some kind. These celebrations are always held near a creek or river to be able to have water to drink. Also, there are usually some trees. Indians by the hundreds were there, and the banks of the river were lined with tepees on both sides for a long distance—horses, dogs, and Indian ponies in every direction. This was something we had not expected to see—an Indian celebration—but here it was, and we were anxious to see all we could. We drove in and out around the tepees. On the ropes that held them in place there was meat hanging out to dry—jackrabbits, prairie dogs, and some we didn't know what it was. It was very amusing, but the smells were not, so we drove on.

The Indians will ride for days by wagon or horseback in order to get to a stream where they can fish, pitch their tents, and while away the days—and perhaps weeks—until they feel inclined to move on. Always along the creeks and rivers there are some trees that seem such a haven during the hot summer days, and the Indians take advantage of every bit of shade. Several times we were glad to follow their example whenever we had an opportunity to camp by a stream in the shade of a few trees. We would wish to stay longer, but as the white man is always on the go, we would stay a few hours and then continue our course.

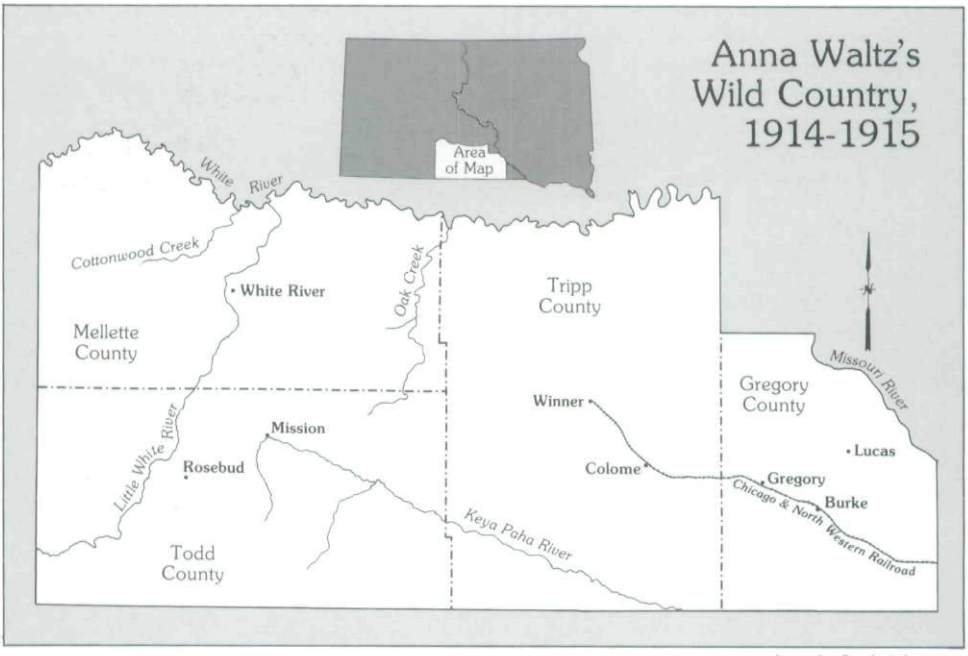
We drove a number of miles without seeing one living creature, not even a prairie dog. No highways nor roads, just Indian trails

9. The town of White River, established in 1911, is actually located on the Little White River, a tributary of the larger stream that runs about fifteen miles north of the town.

going sometimes up, sometimes down, never straight but always angling in snake-fashion across the prairie—first one way, then another—and lined with tumbleweeds on both sides. There were so many tumbleweeds that we came to calling our journey "following the tumbleweed trail."

We had chosen the middle of September to take this trip, thinking it would be more pleasant and not so hot. But this year the heat was hanging on with a tight grip and lasted on into October. We were always so glad to see the sun sinking behind the western horizon, for then we did get some relief, and the latter part of the nights were cool. My husband and I, sleeping in the wagon, were so grateful for the cooling breezes of the night. However, one night the breeze developed into a violent wind, and the wagon seemed more like a ship on a turbulent sea, being rocked and swayed and almost turned over. We expected any minute to be blown across the prairie.

We called to our friends to get in the wagon with us, but they called back that they had taken the bedding off the cot and were lying close to the ground and thought the wisest thing for us to do



map drawn by Sarah Ackermann

was to get out of the wagon and join them. This was rattlesnake country and, being so far from anything like civilization, we decided to stay in the wagon and take what came. Being hurt from an upset wagon, we thought, would not be as disastrous, perhaps, as being bitten by a rattlesnake. Then the wind got so strong that the men yelled at us to get out and hug close to the ground. This lasted several hours and was really terrifying, not knowing any minute where we would land. The next morning was so bright and calm, one could hardly realize the experiences of the long night we had just passed through.

We decided then that we had gone far enough and seen all we cared to see of the so-called wild country, so we started our journey homeward. The two men who had taken this trip with us had made arrangements to go to the nearest railroad town for some supplies, so when we had gotten back as far as the trading post our ways parted. They took the wagon and the horses, and we started our homeward trek with our little top buggy and broncos.

The first day we drove until past sundown, then drove some distance off the trail where we would not be seen by any Indians who might pass that way, and prepared to make camp. We ate a lunch and fed and hobbled the ponies. This hobbling of horses was new to me and very interesting. Not everyone is familiar with the fact that horses can be miles away by morning in this country where there are no fences, and often they pull up a stake to which they have been tied and wander off. This necessitates hobbling, similar to handcuffing, where their front feet are chained together in such a way that they cannot injure themselves but that keeps them from making any progress in distance. After hobbling the broncos, we threw some blankets down on the ground and lay down to sleep—well, not quite all night. During the night one of the ponies got too close to my head; I could feel the hot breath on my face. I raised up just as Babe, one of the ponies, was preparing to include my braids with the grass she was eating. I didn't care to lose them that way even if they were long and heavy. Each braid was two and one-half inches thick and over forty inches long, so I guess poor Babe would have gagged over them anyway and gone on her way. I spoke to her, and she went hobbling away only to come back later. This time my husband tied her to the back of the buggy, and things were more peaceful except for the coyote-howling that had begun in the distance. I don't see how I did it, but I fell asleep in the midst of the howling—I must have been exhausted. The next thing I knew, the sun was shining in my face, for I had slept late, but my husband had been up for some time and had breakfast ready.

Preparatory to leaving, we picked up the blankets on which we had slept and discovered that we had put them directly over some rattlesnake holes. This was the first time I had the privilege of sleeping over a rattlesnake nest. We got into our buggy and left that place pronto!

Later we came to one of the streams where we had camped on the way out, but this time we did not stop to linger in the shade of the few trees because we were anxious to get home. When we drove up the bank on the opposite side of the creek, we discovered our kodak was gone. We had taken some interesting pictures, but we could not go back. It would be impossible to retrace our tracks, for buggy wheels leave an impression in the prairie grass only a short time. We were quite sure we lost it where we had slumbered with the rattlesnakes. Perhaps they had found it, and who knows but what the snakes, prairie dogs, and coyotes had a good time taking each other's pictures. The remainder of the trip was uneventful, and after a few days we saw in the distance the outline of the little village that was home to us. The trip had been a very interesting one with all its ups and downs, and I was thrilled about it, not even dreaming that the wild country beyond White River would in the near future be home to me.

[The memoir of Anna Langhorne Waltz will be continued in the next issue.]

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