

# Proving Up: The Memoir of "Girl Homesteader" Martha Stoecker Norby

GLEND A RILEY,  
*Editor*

*By the beginning of the twentieth century, women homesteaders were an accepted phenomenon in South Dakota. Lured by the promise of a free farm, these usually young, single women set out to acquire a plot of land that they might later sell at a profit, live on and derive support from, or bring to a marriage as a kind of dowry.*

*Various historical sources make mention of the prevalence of "girl homesteaders" as they were commonly called. One scholar of the plains maintained that "a noteworthy proportion of the first settlers were single or unattached women."<sup>1</sup> Another study estimated that, by 1887, as many as one-third of the homesteads in the Dakotas were held by women.<sup>2</sup> Of course, the diaries and*

1. Everett Dick, *The Sod-House Frontier, 1854-1890: A Social History of the Northern Plains from the Creation of Kansas & Nebraska to the Admission of the Dakotas* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1937), p. 129.

2. Mary W. M. Hargreaves, "Women in the Agricultural Settlement of the Northern Plains," *Agricultural History* 50 (Jan. 1976): 182. For estimates of women homesteaders on other regions of the plains, see Sheryll Patterson-Black, "Women Homesteaders on the Great Plains Frontier," in Sheryll and Gene Patterson-Black, *Western Women in History and Literature* (Crawford, Nebr.: Cottonwood Press, 1978), pp. 15-31, and Sheryll Patterson-Black, "Women Homesteaders on the Great Plains Frontier," *Frontiers* 1 (Spring 1976): 67-88.

2     *South Dakota History*

memoirs of women homesteaders provide the most graphic picture of the part these women played in the development of South Dakota. A few of these have been published, but most of them lie untouched in attics and archives.<sup>3</sup>

A particularly interesting example of a woman homesteader's reminiscence is that of Martha Stoecker Norby. The manuscript is held by her daughters, Gretchen Norby Jacobson of Cedar Falls, Iowa, and Dorothy Norby Finch of Brandon, South Dakota, and her son, Paul Norby of Sunland, California, who have graciously given their permission for its reproduction here. The memoir offers an inside look at the attitudes and experiences of a representative "girl homesteader."

Martha Stoecker was born on 22 February 1878 in Ceres, Iowa, a village located between Guttenberg and Garnavillo in north-east Iowa. Her mother migrated to the United States from Rentingen, Switzerland, in 1853 and her father from Württemberg, Germany, in 1857. After their marriage in Elgin, Illinois, in 1865, the couple moved to Clayton County, Iowa. Here, they operated a butcher shop in Garnavillo and then bought a 180-acre farm. Their family eventually grew to eight children, five girls and three boys.

Martha, the youngest of the girls, attended Garnavillo high school for two years, successfully passed her teacher-licensing examinations, and taught school for two years. She then spent a year as a student at the "normal school" at Cedar Falls, the only teacher-training institution in Iowa, and a term at the Normal School in Valparaiso, Indiana.

In October 1904, Martha's life suddenly changed as a result of a letter from her brother George who lived in Manly, Iowa. George informed Martha of a trip he was about to take to Pierre, South Dakota, with his friend, a Reverend Arch, and two other young men from Manly. They planned to look at homestead land with the intention of filing claims. George's letter took Martha by surprise when it invited her to become one of the party. George described the process of homesteading to her: she would take a

3. Two examples of published writings are Edith Eudora Kohl, *Land of the Burnt Thigh* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Co., 1938), which relates the adventures of Kohl and her sister Ida, and Walker D. Wyman, *Frontier Woman: The Life of a Woman Homesteader on the Dakota Frontier* (River Falls: University of Wisconsin-River Falls Press, 1972), which tells the story of Grace W. Fairchild, a divorced homesteader. Two examples of unpublished writings are Cora D. Babcock, *Reminiscences, 1880-1885*, and Grace Reed Porter, "Twenty-five Years in South Dakota," both in the South Dakota Historical Resource Center, Pierre.

*claim adjoining his; they would live on the land after their one-room shacks were built; they would cultivate the land; and after eight months' residence, they would "prove up" and pay fifty cents per acre for final title to the land.*

*Initially, Martha thought the idea "rather interesting." After giving it more thought, she concluded, "What a thrill it would be to own 160 acres of land I had acquired by my own efforts." She also recognized the venture as an opportunity to see Dakota, "that awfully barren state we'd heard so much about in the song 'Dakota Land.'" Since the song ended with the lines "We do not live, we only stay; / We are too poor to get away,"<sup>4</sup> it is a wonder that Martha even considered moving to South Dakota. She was later to remark that she used to sing "Dakota Land" in a lusty way "before I had seen good old South Dakota."<sup>5</sup>*

*The following memoir of her homestead experiences between 1904 and 1908 makes it clear that Martha Stoecker Norby came to love South Dakota.*

On Monday, November 1, 1904, at 12:30 a.m., I boarded a night train on the C. M. and St. Paul in Guttenberg and arrived in Mason City, Iowa, the following morning, Tuesday, November 2, 1904, at 7 a.m. That evening we took the Chicago and Northwestern train for Pierre. We arrived in Pierre at 5 a.m. on Wednesday. Rev. Arch took us to the Riverview Hotel where we stayed overnight. Pierre was the capital city then. Mr. and Mrs. Fuller were our hosts, fine Christian people, and we had comfortable beds and fine meals.

There were immense crowds in Pierre at the time. The capital fight was on. Huron, Mitchell, Pierre, and Yankton were all wanting to get the capital in their cities. The old capitol building was still in use, an old rickety frame building. When we walked on some of the floors upstairs the boards were so loose they moved and rattled for lack of being nailed down. They were old, unpainted boards. That morning we went down near the Missouri River. The men took their rifles and shot at frogs, birds, and any other thing they saw.

4. John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax, *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan Co., 1938), pp. 411.

5. Quotations from Martha Stoecker Norby are taken from portions of her memoir that are not reproduced here.



4      *South Dakota History*

After eating dinner at Riverview we started west, crossed the river to Fort Pierre by ferry, then west on the Deadwood Trail to the Burnt Creek region with Rev. Vogt of Pierre, who was to show us the land. Men who did that work were called locaters. He had a three-seated open buggy and was driving a team of beautiful black horses. We crossed the Missouri on the steamer, then on west toward Hayes, 40 miles distant.

The land was rolling and there were many creeks to cross on the way. Being late in the fall, they had little water, much mud. There were no bridges. Some creeks had queer names such as Willow Creek, Lance Creek, Lans Hole, and Frozen Man Creek, so named because a man was found frozen to death nearby the little village of Hayes. Burnt Creek was on west. Next we arrived in Hayes and spent the night at [William] Hopkins' Road Ranch. Hopkins and his sister [Ella Porterfield] ran the hotel—out there called a road ranch—and Mr. Hopkins had a grocery and some other articles for sale. He was the Hayes postmaster. Mail was carried by stagecoach from Fort Pierre by the stagecoach driver of Pierre.

*West of the Missouri River in the early twentieth century, road ranches, such as "The Togo Road Ranch Store and Buffet," functioned as all-purpose accommodations for the traveler.*



The Togo Road Ranch Store And Buffet The  
Ideal Place To Eat To Sleep To Drink To Enjoy  
Robert Reuber Proprietor S O. On Deadwood Trail

The following morning we started west again through Hayes, passed Togo's Road Ranch, named after the Japanese Admiral Togo. We crossed Telegraph Creek, Wagon Creek, Hound Creek, Plum and Cottonwood creeks. Passed Bob Gray's Road Ranch. Bob and his sister [Mary] were proprietors. Then we crossed Prairie Dog Creek and arrived where we were to locate our claims. After looking it over, we decided to name it Pleasant Valley, near Burnt Creek. Magee's Road Ranch was nearby, and Mrs. Helen Magee made us very welcome and prepared a good dinner for us.

In her log house she had some nice things stored away in a trunk. She brought out her hemstitched linen tablecloth and dinner napkins and some dainty china and good Dakota plum jam. She took a liking for me and gave me a lovely china plate, which I still have. Her only son was away attending school, and she liked me so much she wanted me to write him and get acquainted with a view to becoming his wife. Well, in my youth, and with my bringing up, girls didn't make the advances. That was a man's job, and one had to be properly introduced and know who the man was and what he was like first. So that went undone. So much for that.

We chose our homesteads. Mine was the NW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 2, in Twp. 3, Range 24, Stanley Co., S.Dak. We picked some lovely wild flowers out there. I have some pressed. The homesteads chosen this trip were on a slight rise overlooking a large area. Burnt Creek was nearby, a good place for a dam in case we lived out there long enough to warrant building one.

After we decided to take up claims we started back to Pierre, stayed the night at Gray's Road Ranch. The Grays, like a number of ranchers, resented having settlers come in lest they lose their cattle-grazing land, so they complained of drouth and lack of rain, said one couldn't raise anything. I asked him if that was the case, how come they had that big patch of fine potatoes across the creek that looked like they would produce a bumper crop? They didn't have an answer.

It was autumn and roundup time, and as we were coming back to Pierre, near the trail, were a group of cowboys with their wagons, saddle horses, and herds of cattle they had rounded up to cull those that were ready for market. I couldn't see how they could be so fat from that short, dry, brown buffalo grass. Cattle so fat, where did they get feed! Of course we were curious, so Rev. Vogt stopped and we saw the cook shack, and the men were ready to eat supper. The cook had prepared roast beef, potato salad, coffee, etc., and they invited us to have supper with them. It was a good meal, and the men were so kind it was really fun. So after



6 *South Dakota History*

thanking them we drove on. During the trip out and back the weather was ideal, except it was so hot in the afternoons (first week in November) that we had to raise an umbrella, one of the big, old-fashioned kind. At about four it got cool enough so we put our coats on. On our return to Pierre we went to the U. S. Land Office to file our claims. The conditions were: (1) we had six months time before starting residence, (2) build a home, (3) cultivate 10 acres, at least, and (4) at the end of that, advertise intention to prove up. After proof, pay 50 cents per acre.

When we came back from Burnt Creek and were on the Fort Pierre side of the Missouri, waiting for the ferry, there were Indians waiting too. An Indian woman was wearing a lovely, gaily-colored woolen blanket. I was so anxious to get one. I asked her if she'd sell it. She said yes. I asked her how much she wanted, and she said, "We usually get \$1.00." I said, "Okay." I still have the blanket. It is in excellent condition. I bought a small leather, beaded purse, Indian-made, which I also have.

The Riverview Hotel was so full we went to the Locke Hotel for the night. I was to room with a woman and her daughter. The woman said later her grown son was to occupy the room also. That wasn't for me. Well, the woman didn't look too trustworthy, and I wasn't in the habit of occupying sleeping rooms with men, so I told my brother. We checked out and made inquiry if we could get a room in a private home. The Elmer Schwarz family, lovely Christian people, took me in, and I slept on a couch in the living room. I had breakfast with them the next morning and family worship.

After all this and a little more of seeing Pierre, we started on our way back to Iowa. Brother couldn't decide to leave his Iowa farm. In order to hold the land we had to go out once or twice a year and stay a few days. On one trip houses weren't furnished, so I slept in a hammock. It was raining but I had enough roof over me so I was OK. My brother slept on the ground. At the end of two years brother George decided to give up his claim, but I went out the spring of 1906 to live all by myself.

Rev. Vogt had a man take out lumber for the group and build our shacks, which were to be 9x12, but the builder evidently wasn't too good at measuring so they were 8x10. The lumber, hauling, and building cost me \$12.50. I still have the bill. I had an oil heater, gasoline stove, dishes, store-bought chair, a box for a table, and cot. When I started living there, there weren't any single women on claims near there, but single men and women came fast that spring, also married couples.

People were curious about me living alone, and the boys called me "the freak." Also I had had heavy work teaching for a number of years and had gotten very thin, so when they saw me walking on the prairies over to Van Cleave's Road Ranch they called me "Walking Typhoid."

Cy Van Cleave and wife bought the ranch from Mrs. Magee and, besides ranching, kept overnight and fed travelers who came west on the Deadwood Trail. They had two sons, John and Roy. I used to walk over (2½ miles west) and help Mrs. Van Cleave with her work—cooking, washing dishes, ironing—to earn a little extra. Rattlers were plentiful so I wore men's heavy canvas leggings and had a good stick I put out in front of me to frighten them out of my path, in case there were any.

There were two families one-half mile west of my homestead, very fine Christian people from Illinois. I bought milk, butter, bread, and some meat from them. They hauled water for me, too, 25 cents a barrel. Everyone had wooden barrels and the water was hauled from a nearby dam where cattle and horses drank and waded and people went swimming. No one got typhoid. Guess the minerals and sun purified the water. Of course we all had to be saving. One of the boys jokingly said he washed dishes, washed his clothes, took a bath all in the same water, then strained it nine times and used it for drinking water. I did this though: shampooed my hair, then washed my hose, and then used the same water to wash the floor.

After I'd been there for a few weeks, one day a man from east of the [Missouri] river came along. He had a gentle pony for sale, a family pet, coal black and gentle. So I bought her for \$30.00 and named her Topsy. I sent to Sears & Roebuck for a saddle and bridle and was soon riding fast and happily over the prairie.

The Ed Kimbro family lived nearby. We used to go over there Sunday mornings for Sunday School and worship. Quite a number of us young people also went to Epworth League meetings. One Sunday evening 14 young men and women planned to go to Ottumwa to League. One young fellow had no saddle, so 13 of us went on horseback. I still have the pamphlet giving names and topics for service for the season for Epworth League [a Methodist youth organization]. The Kimbros were neat and clean, but like many people, had dirt floors in their house and got fleas. Fleas got a start, and I usually came home with some and how they bit me.

A fine young man, Harry Burns, plowed 10 acres and put in corn for me, and I had a few watermelon seeds in the sod breaking. I didn't think I'd raise any, but one day a neighbor came over





*Martha Stoecker, astride her pony Topsy, posed beside her eight-by-ten-foot claim shack. Stoecker was one of the many girl homesteaders who braved the isolation and harshness of the Great Plains in order to "prove up" on a claim in the early 1900s.*

with a large ripe melon that had grown on that sod breaking. It was delicious, but there was only one. I had a little door in the floor where I could put a stone jar to keep water cool under the shack. It worked quite well.

My furniture that first year consisted of a stove, cot, and big store box I'd shipped things in from Iowa. I stored things in it, and with the top on it was my table. I had a kerosene lamp and the necessary dishes and cooking utensils, which were not many. I needed a chair, so I rode up to a neighbor's and bought one for a dollar and carried it home on Topsy's back. Still have it. I got my mail at Van Cleave's, and two fine young men who lived east of me used to drive past, pick up letters I wanted to send, and bring my mail back.

One morning I took my cot outside, thought I'd sit there and write to my parents. I got sleepy and lay down and slept. When I awoke there was a big rattler coiled up on top of the bank of dirt thrown up against the shack rattling like fury, about 10 or 12 feet away. I was frightened, got up and went inside and loaded my rifle. I took aim and fired, hit it in the middle, and how it rattled and hissed. I waited a little while until I was calm and quit shak-



ing and then fired again and blew its head to bits. I took the hoe and chopped the rattles off. There were nine. I still have them. I never slept outdoors again after that.

Occasionally I went to some of the neighbors and they came to see me. I was just about out of bread, so I persuaded Bert to make baking powder biscuits while I got the coffee and other things ready. Bert was from Kentucky, a kind, gentlemanly fellow. His mother was with him, and she was a real Christian lady. Bert gave me his tin oblong tobacco box painted yellow for my buttons, pins, thread, and needles. I still have it.

People asked me, "wasn't I lonely and frightened?" Yes, at times, when the coyotes howled at night and the whooping cranes flew over before daylight, it sounded weird. I was never alone, my Lord was ever near, and I read my Bible, so I was assured of His loving care and protection. Then, too, I knew my Christian parents were asking God to watch over me, and He certainly answered their prayers.

The Fullers had a canopy top surrey with a fringe, and they used to take me along to church services and for rides. They were grand neighbors. One night coming home from services we drove into a lake bed. The water and mud were deep, but we turned and got out safely.

One of my fine friends during the summer of 1906 was Clara Kuck from Charles City, Iowa. She and her father had homesteads. They were fine Christian people. Clara bought a pony, too, but wasn't as fortunate as I. Hers was much older and somewhat bony, so she called him Bonypart. We had many rides together, picked up buffalo horns around the lake beds, and found lovely wild flowers.

During the summer I heard the Hayes people were building a schoolhouse and would need a teacher. I decided to apply, so I mounted Topsy and rode down 15 miles and applied in person. There were 14 applications. I was chosen. Then I had to go to Fort Pierre to take the teachers examination.

The day I started for Fort Pierre to take the teachers examination I saddled Topsy, got on her back and pulled my suitcase up on her back, and rode up to the Deadwood Trail. I turned Topsy loose, and the Fullers got her and cared for her for me.

After I waited for some time, a man came along riding on the running gears of a farm wagon and driving two horses. I hailed him and asked for a ride to Hayes, 15 miles. It was a rather uncomfortable place to sit, but I made it and was happy. I stayed in Hayes that night at Will Hopkins' Road Ranch and in the morning

10      *South Dakota History*

started out with a family in a big farm wagon. We all sat in the box, man, woman, children, and I. We got as far as Allen's Road Ranch, stayed overnight, and then on to Fort Pierre the next day, about 16 or 20 miles. I wrote the exams, passed, and got my certificate. I stayed at the Riverview while in town, and one of the girls asked me to take her place as waitress for a few weeks while she went on vacation. The work was new to me, but I enjoyed it and earned a little extra money.

Shortly after, I went back to the claim. After arriving I went out to see my garden. O my! Was I surprised! I had sown some turnip seed before I left, on the 21st of July. There had been several rains and the turnips had grown so. They were the flat type. Some were six inches in diameter. I could hardly believe it. I thought I'd sell them, but a neighbor advised me to wait until later. He would bury them, and later when he dug them up I would get a much better price. Later when he dug them up they were frozen and spoiled and I was minus the money.

September was nearly gone when I kept asking to begin school. Furniture hadn't come. They let me begin school with a fine, big, hard coal stove, old rickety table, a chair, two planks, and four boxes. The planks were placed on the boxes to make seats for the pupils. It was uncomfortable sitting, so I'd let them sit on the floor when they cared to and put their books and slates on the planks for desks. I was to receive \$40.00 per month teaching the school, Dist. #3, in Hayes, Stanley County.

We burned the scrap lumber left from building until it was gone and then finally got coal. I got disgusted waiting for desks, so I wrote to the clerk of the school board several times to please hurry and get the furniture and sent the notes home with the children. One day Mr. Hopkins [chair of the school board] called on me, and he looked very stern, or tried to, and said, "I had a note from the clerk's wife saying she wants the school ma'am to quit writing notes to her husband." I was disgusted, told Mr. Hopkins what my notes were written for. He burst out laughing because her accusation was so ridiculous. Then I laughed too. You would have, too, if you could have seen the man. Soon the furniture came, and I bought some material for sash curtains, put up pictures, and we looked quite cozy.

The longer I stayed, the more I realized we needed Sunday School and preaching, so I decided to hold a box social to raise money to buy an organ. The evening for the social came, and of course there were those who wanted to buy the schoolma'am's (as they called teachers) lunch. I had it trimmed nicely but over it a very ordinary covering so no one could tell it was mine. A nice,



elderly gentleman bought it, and I treated him in the same friendly manner I would have treated a young man.

I don't remember how much the proceeds were, seems to me over \$60.00. So I ordered an organ, a good one, from Sears Roebuck and had enough left to buy a dictionary stand. I believe the organ was \$57.00 and the stand \$3.00. From then on we had Sunday School and worship at the schoolhouse.

Rev. Oscar Tell, who stayed in Hayes and did the preaching as a rule, also went out and preached other places. When it came



*Neighbors and friends helped to break the isolation of homesteading, and Martha Stoecker organized and attended church meetings and social gatherings in and around Hayes, South Dakota. In this group, Stoecker is standing in the back row, third from the right, with her tie blowing to the side.*

time for services in Hayes he would go to the saloon, wave his hands and call to the saloon-keeper to close up and bring his guests to worship.

One evening during the autumn I started for the claim. It was sprinkling and as I traveled on it began to rain quite hard. When I reached Gray's Road Ranch I stopped for the night. The rain turned to a snowstorm. I was cold and it seemed I couldn't get warm. Miss Gray put me to bed, got a pair of her brother Rob's socks, sprinkled red pepper in them to keep my feet warm. The pepper didn't bother that night, but the following day after the storm



12      *South Dakota History*

subsided, I thought I'd stop by to see neighbors Mr. and Mrs. Carr. Their shack was banked up good with sod and was good and warm. There was a fire in their little laundry stove. I sat down, put my feet up to the stove to warm them, and then, oh my, the red pepper began to act. I thought I'd go frantic, they burned so badly. Mrs. Carr got a basin of water and I put my feet in, got rid of the pepper, and was finally able to get my feet dressed, glad I could walk.

Another time I stayed at Gray's it was a chilly night. Miss Gray wanted to be especially good to me. Two ladies occupied a bed in the room. She had fixed what she called a special one for me so I could sleep alone. I went to bed, or laid down. It was a place she'd prepared, a lot of folded canvas. It was so hard and cold I shivered from the cold. There was no way I could get warm. I told the women, they said to get in bed with them. I did and it was so warm and cozy, lying on a feather bed, I slept. Was I glad to get a warm place. One time I slept there and had head lice from having slept where the people were kind enough to leave them. Another time I got a queer little bug that bit hard. I killed it and told a neighbor about it. She said, "O, that was a grayback," the worst kind of louse. I was glad I found and killed it so there weren't any more.

When winter came and I no longer went to the claim, I stayed in Hayes at Hopkins' Road Ranch. One night a large number of us piled into a bob sleigh and drove out east to friends who had a sheep ranch, several thousand I guess, horses and cattle, and a large dam on the place. The snow was deep and it was cold. When we got near the driver decided to drive over the dam. But although the ice was thick quite a long distance, it was thin near the center, so he turned and drove off and on the way, and we were happy not to get drowned. After visiting, and a delicious lunch, we started back to Hayes. We got sort of puzzled just where to drive, so Rev. Tell took the lantern, walked ahead, and guided us on the way, and we got back safely.

Another time I was invited to spend the night at one of the ranches nearby. A storm came up during the night and was pretty bad by morning. I had to be back for school, so I mounted Topsy and started. The wind was so cold and strong and snow flying, but good old Topsy put her head down and made a beeline for Hayes. She always knew the way back. I had Topsy cared for at the livery barn in Hayes that winter. All went well until I wouldn't accept the attentions of the man who ran it, so to give

vent to his feelings he gave Topsy instead of me a beating. Her head was swollen terribly, poor thing, but she recovered.

There was a Bohemian who lived on a claim, used to pile up the cow chips in his shack and use them for fuel. That winter he came to stay at the hotel. He slept in the corral or bullpen, as they called the big bedroom upstairs, where there were 21 beds in one room. This fellow was so filthy dirty some of the men couldn't stand the odor, so one of the fellows bought him a complete outfit, took a tub of water upstairs, made him take a bath, then took a stick and threw his clothes out of the window, and burned them. Guess that helped for a while.

At Christmas time I wanted to go back to Iowa to see my parents. I drove to Pierre with several friends who were going to Illinois to spend Christmas. We all sat on the floor of the wagon box and laughed and tried to keep warm. The driver stood and said when we reached Pierre that he appreciated the fact that we didn't fuss and cry.

After my visit at home I took the train back to Pierre. The hotel was crowded, no beds. But the proprietor said there were two children in a double bed, maybe I could crawl in with them. I didn't hesitate to get to bed. The youngsters were nice and warm and I slept.

The next day I took the stagecoach for Hayes. The stage driver had the old-fashioned western coach and drove two or three teams of horses. It was bitter cold, and another lady and her daughter and I tried to share a foot warmer, but it wasn't much for three pairs of feet.

I didn't go out to the claim during the bitter cold weather. I didn't want to risk freezing to death in my shack. One morning about the middle of February I started up the hill to the schoolhouse. The sun was up high and it was clear, a perfectly beautiful morning. At about 10 a.m. the wind came up and it began to get cold. When I went down to the hotel for dinner it was snowing a little and getting very cold. By the time it was 4 p.m. a blizzard was in full swing. The wind blew the snow so we couldn't see the posts of the fence around the schoolhouse. I told the children we would stay at school, it was too dangerous to try to go home. In a little while two men came to take us home. In those days teachers wore aprons of black sateen. I tied my apron on one boy's head, towel on another, dust rag on another, scarf, and anything I could find. Then we all took hold of hands and started to the hotel. Before we got there another group started after us. They thought



we'd strayed from the right way. We reached the hotel, and I was glad I had them all with me in safekeeping. When evening came we danced to the music of a Victrola, the kind that was so popular, one with a big horn and picture of a big dog, "His Master's Voice."

During the night two sheep herders froze to death. They became cold and bewildered. One was exhausted and lay down in the snow. The other knelt down beside him, tried to help him, and they both froze to death in that position within a short distance of their house. Their faithful dog stayed with them. He was not harmed. He hadn't had whiskey.

There were fine people and queer people with all the rest. As time went on, many people came and went. People drove to Pierre and Fort Pierre with team and lumber wagon and brought out a load of groceries to last from fall until spring or summer.

After school closed I went out to the claim. My brother Albert had taken over the claim brother George had given up. Father gave him a carload of lumber, lumber wagon, a cow, chickens, a lot of food, harness, and other things, so he built himself a good house, stable, chicken house, and a new bigger, better house for me. Before he got all the roof on, it began to rain, and how. The roof leaked, even the bed got wet. I'd put the table oilcloth on and put the big umbrella up, but still it got wet. He brought a cook stove, but the coal got wet, and we stayed in bed until 11 it was so cold. Also the tar paper wasn't on the outside and the wind blew in. Was it ever cold!

As soon as it cleared up, bedding and all was put out to dry. Brother had been telling me it never rained out there, but he found out it did. I giggled when it started to rain, but I quit after two days and two nights. It stopped about noon the third day and we got things dry. Then Albert put tar paper on outside and finished the roofs. Our houses were cozy and dry.

We each had some plowing done and put in a garden. We had nice vegetables and some corn. Albert brought a horse, so with my Topsy we had a team to hitch to our lumber wagon. We put two barrels in it and hauled water from the dam. It was nice to ride in any kind of rig, and we were quite the envy of some neighbors when we rode in our red painted lumber wagon, but we could get around and attend to our water hauling and other things.

Brother planted a garden. We had nice vegetables and a patch of corn that did well. When brother proved up and went back home to Iowa, taking products he'd raised, people wouldn't believe he'd raised it out there, said he'd bought it after he got back.



After Albert came, some men used to stop. He had a big bed, so if necessary three could sleep in it. Some would stop and ask if they could sleep there, have supper and breakfast. I'd tell them they need not pay for the bed, but 25 cents for the meals. Some were glad to pay, others offended, but it put an end to those expecting free meals. We gave some but weren't rich enough to feed everyone.

One Syrian who drove down past our place on his way to Midland, 15 miles south, used to stop for dinner. He was willing to pay. He was very nice and gentlemanly, but one day with a longing look in his eyes he told me how lonely he was living alone. He said, "I wash myself, I cook myself, I eat myself. O, it's bad for me." I decided I couldn't return his kindly feelings and didn't cook for him much longer.

I proved up later in the summer. During the winter or near spring, one day two young men rode up on horseback and stopped for dinner at Hopkins' Road Ranch or hotel in Hayes. They sat opposite me at the dinner table. I couldn't help noticing both, but especially one. He [Albert Norby] was so fine looking, looked so neat, and was tall and walked so straight. I pretended not to look up but did a few times, and he was looking at me. Through with dinner, I got up and went back to school but took a last look as they rode out of town. They were on their way to Sansarc, 16 miles northwest, to visit their mother. One worked at a ranch, and the other had been in the service in the Philippine Insurrection. The one was such a contrast to what the type of men was around here, I couldn't help noticing him but thought no more, he'll not be back.

Before very long he came back to Hayes to work in the printing office. That was his trade. The printer's wife introduced me, and before long he asked me to go for a ride. He'd bought a pony and saddle, too.

He came about February, and the following July we were engaged. He said when he saw me he wanted me for his wife. He had planned to go to Panama, but changed his mind after seeing me. A year later we were married in the old Lutheran church that was two blocks away from my home in Iowa, July 14, 1908. It was the church where I had been baptized and confirmed, and now I was married there.

Mother wasn't well so we had only the nearest relatives. Dinner was served in my home. Fred and Katherine [Martha's brother and sister] took us to Guttenberg where we were to take the train to Dubuque and then take a steamboat on the Mississip-

16     *South Dakota History*

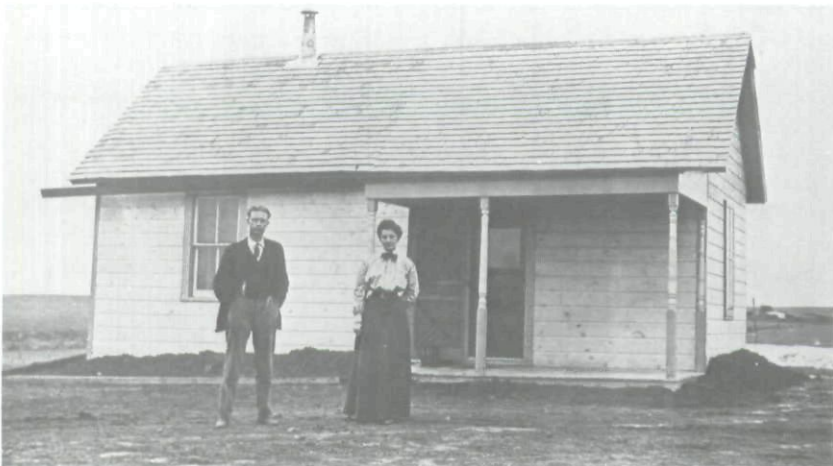
pi River for the wedding trip to Minneapolis. When the train was pulling into Dubuque the steamboat had already started, was in midstream. So we stayed in Dubuque for a few days, then back to my home, then visited some relatives of both of us on the way back. They entertained us and gave us nice presents.

When we reached Hayes we were a day late for the party the folks had for us, but anyway they gave us a lovely oak rocker and charivari. We fixed our three-room house real cozy—kitchen, living room, bedroom, and porch on the east side, that was all ready for us for \$6.00 a month rent.

My new husband bought the Stanley County *Homestead* the year after, also published the *Manila Courier* and *Sansarc Sun*.

When Christmas came we were lonely. I prepared a nice Christmas dinner—roast chicken, pumpkin pie, mashed potatoes, pickles, cranberries, and other things. We were about to have dinner when a rap came at the door and our good neighbor, Harry Lovald, had come to ask us to have Christmas dinner with him and his family. I put my dinner in a basket and took it along, and we had a jolly time. The Lovalds were fine friends.

In the early days people drove to Fort Pierre for supplies. Ranchers drove long distances and brought wagon loads of flour, sugar, meat, bacon, potatoes, canned goods, and other things to last until spring.



*The newly married Norbys stand outside their "cozy" three-room home in Hayes, South Dakota.*

In 1908 the telephone was built from Fort Pierre to Hayes. The Chicago and Northwestern R.R. was built about 1906—the railroad between Fort Pierre was built, the ferries were no longer used. A train used to run over to Fort Pierre called the bridge train and called the Dinky. It was a joy for us homesteaders when the first train on the R. C. and Pierre R. R. went west. We could see the smoke and hear the whistle when it went through Midland, 15 miles south of the Van Cleave Road Ranch.

*Martha Stoecker Norby was eighty-three years old when she wrote this detailed and lucid memoir. Unfortunately, it ends in 1908 when she married Albert Norby. In a note added to the manuscript, Martha's eldest daughter, Dorothy Norby Finch, listed the dates of the Norby children's births: Dorothy in 1909, Paul in 1914, and Gretchen Eva in 1915. Dorothy also recalled her mother's account of a family vacation trip to the Black Hills in 1910 on the "railroad that they were so happy about." At the Homestake Mine, Albert bought Martha a brooch that she later gave to Dorothy. The following year, 1911, a drought created "huge cracks" in the ground. When the Norbys' planting failed to sprout due to the dry weather, they moved to Fort Pierre, where they lived until the fall of 1925 when they relocated in Sioux Falls.*

*In 1915, Albert Norby served as a state representative from Stanley County.<sup>6</sup> He died of a heart attack one month after his sixtieth birthday. After a long widowhood, Martha died in Sioux Falls on 3 November 1971, just three months before her ninety-fourth birthday.*

6. A sketch of Albert Norby's activities in the Fort Pierre and Stanley County area appears in the *Fort Pierre Times*, 19 Aug. 1921.



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