

Sarah S. Cameron

Her Life Story

Dictated by her at the age of eighty-five years and addressed
to her children and family

THE daughter of Rev. Caleb and Saphronia Head Bundy, I was born on the 17th day of January, 1847, in Highland County, Ohio. When I was seven years of age my parents removed to Canton, Fulton County, Ill. At Canton my father was foreman in the Parlen and Orendorf machine shop and helped to make the first steel plow share. In the spring of 1856 my father was called to Cuba, Illinois, to take charge of a circuit, the pastor having died. We lived in Cuba until the fall of this year. I remember that my father rode to the several charges on horseback. Before going to Cuba father had planned to come to Iowa and in the fall of 1856 during the Fremont-Buchanan campaign we started for Jasper County, Iowa. I was disturbed because father was unable to vote in that election. We as Whigs were strongly in support of Fremont and Fillmore. We made the trip from Cuba, Illinois, to Monroe, Jasper County, Iowa, in a covered wagon. The other members of the family were my sisters, Mary and Rebecca. We crossed the Mississippi River at Burlington by ferry. I do not recall that we saw a railroad train on this journey. We later removed to Prairie City in Jasper County. Here my father conducted a blacksmith shop and on Sundays preached at various points in the vicinity.

In 1864, near the close of the Civil War, I was married to Captain Charles Dustin, who was then home on a veteran furlough from the army. To this union were born seven children, three of whom died in infancy. The four living children are Gertrude Ballou, of Glidden, Iowa; Lou Creveling, of Boone, Iowa; Charles Dustin, of Gray, Iowa, and Thomas Dustin, of Maxwell, Iowa.

At the time we lived in Prairie City, the State Capitol was moved from Iowa City to Fort Des Moines. The records were taken across the country by sleds and the officers were transported by the Western Stage Co. In 1869 my father was elected to the State House of Representatives and served in the Thirteenth General Assembly. While he was in the Legislature an appropriation was made for the erection of the south wing of the State House.

From Jasper County I went with my husband to Western Kansas. At this time buffaloes and Indians roamed over the prairie. The Indians were peaceable, though on several occasions we were called into the Fort by Indian scares. At one time a large herd of buffaloes passed near the dugout in which we lived. For fear that they would go over us we all got into a wagon. The herd swerved around us, however.

The first year we lived in Kansas there was a terrible drought and everything burned up. The next year with plenty of rain our crops were growing fine. In midsummer the grasshoppers came. The sun was clouded by their flight. A cottonwood tree which stood behind the log cabin in which we then lived was stripped of its leaves in a single night. The spring near our cabin from which we secured water was filled with dead grasshoppers. In order to get water we sunk a stove pipe in the creek and kept it covered.

In the year 1874 with my children I came to Exira. I taught school in Viola township and in the first school established in Audubon. The school building was located near the Northwestern depot. T. B. Creveling and Edward Bilharz were two of my pupils in Audubon. T. B. Creveling afterwards married my daughter, Lou.

In 1879 I was married to John Cameron and from then until 1917 resided on the same farm in Lincoln township. To this union five children were born, two died in infancy, Allan lived to the age of seventeen years; Grace M. Garmire, now living in Gray, Iowa, and James L. Cameron, of Eldora, Iowa. In 1917 having sold our Lincoln township farm, John and I moved to Gray. John died in 1923 and since that time I have lived with my daughter, Grace.

My father's people were French Huguenots who were driven out of France by religious persecution. They first came to Albemarle Sound in North Carolina. Later they removed to West Virginia. At Albemarle Sound my grandfather, Zadok Bundy, was married to Rebecca Reece. The Bundy family and Reece family were Quakers or Friends. They were bitterly opposed to slavery and I have heard that they assisted in establishing the "underground railway" for escaping slaves. This anti slave feeling caused them to move from West Virginia to Highland County, Ohio, though West Virginia was not a slave holding state. My father was a self educated man. As a girl I can remember of his studying Greek and Latin by the light of the fireplace and tallow candles. He was greatly interested in public education and encouraged his children to get all the advancement possible at that time. At the age of fourteen I taught a public school maintained by private subscription as the regular public school was closed for lack of funds. My pay was very small and not all of that was collected, but I enjoyed teaching and it did not matter greatly. I remember that one woman who thought I had done so well with her children paid me with a dollar bill. The bill I later found out was counterfeit.

My mother's people were Virginians. My maternal grandmother was the daughter of Captain Jacob Ogle who was killed by the Indians in a raid on Fort Henry, Ohio, three months before my grandmother was born. The account of his death is related in Zane Grey's novel, "Betty Zane." I presume by this I can lay some claim to being a descendant of the F. F. V.'s. My mother's brother was Bigger Head, an early settler at Prairie City and an extensive land owner and farmer.

I have lived a long time. Some of it is borrowed time. As Dr. Beers, an early doctor at Gray used to say. "If I had my life to live over again, I might do better but it is possible I might do worse." If my time has come I believe I am ready to go and only hope that my body does not outlive my mind.

I should say something about my family. Besides my six children living at this time I have 24 grandchildren and 24 great grandchildren.

One grandson, Arthur Ballou, died in the service of his country in the World War. My two sisters, Mary Todd and Rebecca Hardenbrook, are both deceased, Mary having died at Custer, South Dakota, over twenty years ago, and Rebecca at Exira in 1931. Of my early associates in Audubon County I recall only two who are now living. My husband's sister, Kate C. Paul, now 84 years of age, living in Chicago; John Bonwell, of Viola township, who lived near the school that I taught in that township. Viola township, by the way, was named for Viola Sanborn, now Viola Dutt, of Deadwood, South Dakota. She was a niece of Mr. Cameron and was the first white child born in the township. Cameron township was named for my husband, John, and his brother, Beck. The two brothers broke the first prairie sod in the north part of Audubon county. I wish I could describe the beautiful flowers that grew on the unbroken prairie. In the spring it was a carpet of flowers stretching for miles and miles. Now I suppose those flowers no longer grow, they have gone like the flocks of prairie chickens which were so numerous in the early days.

I must bring this message to its close. I will be unable again to see all of my family. I wish in this way to remember them and be remembered by them. At 85 years of age my span of life is nearly run; there comes to me now as it has often in the past the beautiful words of the Psalmist—the 23rd Psalm.

With love to all,

Sarah S. Cameron.