

[Mrs. Arthur B. Duncan]

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McGuire, Delise

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Floyd County

District 17

“Recollections of A Pioneer Mother”

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(By Mrs. Arthur B. Duncan, First settler of Floyd Co) [?] Little dugout home so lowly Knew
you not that in your keeping Dwelt the builders of a nation The beginning of a people? As
they heard the wild birds calling Love notes at the mating season Love, between a man
and maiden Built the first homes in the West. Years have passed, and from their labor
Now a West of Strength and beauty Rises forth in all its splendor Like a bright Celestial
City But when evening's sun is sinking And the world is wrapped in shadow Seems I hear
the West Wind sighing For those little dugout homes.

With my husband and my seven months old son, I left Montague County on the 1st day
of March, in the year 1884, to go to that part of the Plains now known as Floyd County
to file on a homestead. With us went an orphan boy whose name was Bob Prine Prince .
We were on the road three months, reaching our destination on June 1st of that year. Our
road was little more than a trail for the greater part of this long journey. There had been
little commerce or transportation into this new country. Sometimes, when we would get too

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tire tired to sit longer in the wagon, we would get out and walk beside the trails with Bob driving the wagon.

I remember one experience during this trip which has remained vividly in my mind throughout the years that followed as typical of the many emergencies we we're to meet in the months ahead. In Wichita County, still many miles from our destination and from any sign of human habitation, we were going down the old McKenzie trail. My husband and I were walking beside the wagon, as the horses were having hard going. Continued travel over the trail over the trail had [???] 2 worn the ruts so deep that we had travelled for hours without an opportunity to turn out. We told Bob to hatch for a chance to turn out, but to be careful, but when he pulled out of the trail the tongue snapped in two. Arthur said, "What are we going to do?" I said: "We have a saw and a hammer and some nails and sore bed slats. We will fix it". and we did, we so well in fact that we used it for several years before that tongue was ever replaced with another.

I don't think I shall ever remember anything more beautiful than my first sight of the plans. It was at the time of the year when when nature is at her best in this county. The trees in the canyon were green The whole region looked untoughed untouched by the hand of man. As we drove along we saw great white mounds of buffalo bones, piled there by the men who had killed the buffalo for the hides, leaving the bones to bleach. Later these were gathered up and shipped to eastern factories to be used in making fertilizer. We saw very few live buffalo. There were occasional small herds of antelope, beautiful timid creatures that ran on sight of our invading wagon. Coyotes were plentiful and often came quite close to our wagon or our camp. We had to watch out for rattlesnakes too. Sometimes we would find them directly in our trail, barring further passage until they had been disposed of, or sunning on the rocks in the canyon.

Our first stop after coming up on the caprock was the home of Hank Smith, still known as the "Rock House". They had been here fifteen years when we came. We made camp and I went up to the house to get some milk and thus met Mrs. Hank Smith for the first time.

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3 She very kind to us and extended to us the same hospitality for which she has always been known. They lived in what is known as Crosby County, and she was the first lady [?] to live in that county.

We stayed there by the rock house for nearly three months before my husband found a site on which he wanted to establish our homestead. The State was giving this land to settlers who would live on it for three years. We drove our wagon down to the place he had chosen, made camp, and then he set out for Clarendon to file on the land, leaving me there to hold the site while he was gone. I felt very much alone away off down there in the canyon, in a strange country, without any protection except my own and what meager assurance the fourteen year old Bob could offer. As night came on a black cloud began to come up in thd west and Bob came to the wagon to say that he had found a sheepherder's dugout a short distance away where he thought we had better go as it was going to "Rain the bottom out" by the time night fell. I hated to go, but as the cloud grew nearer and blacker I decided that it would be better. I was afraid the sheep herder would come in and find us trespassing on his property. The storm was terrible and we were glad we had sought better shelter than our wagon. As it grew dark inside the dugout, Bob cut down some dried pieces of meat which were hung from the ceiling and made a fire of them. This gave us both light and heat, for which we were extremely grateful. When it was quiet again outside we climbed out of the dugout and went back to the wagon/ The next day Bob went back to the dugout and under the sheepherder's bed, which was hung from the top of the dugout, he found a big rattlesnake. I was certainly glad we had decided not to sleep in that dugout. 4 The next five days passed quickly enough, but I shall never forget how glad I was to see my husband come riding in at the end of the fifth day. He had lost his hat in a dust storm. He was tired and dusty and hungry but he had the necessary papers for our homestead and we were ready to make plans for our new home. Early the next morning, however, we had a caller. A cowboy came up to the wagon and told us that they wanted to see him, my husband, down at the corral, which he indicated was only a short distance down the canyon from our camp. They were men of the T M Bar ranch and were English

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landowners and cattlemen. The land on which we had filed happened to be on some of their range. Of course stockmen in that day had it in for the "Nesters" as they called them and I was afraid for Arthur to go down there where they were. I said "Arthur, are you going down there with nothing to defend yourself?" and he replied: "I am not afraid of them" and went ahead. When he got down to the corral, the boss of the outfit asked him just how he proposed to make a living. He told them it was "none of their danged business". When they found that they could not discourage him or intimidate him, they announced that they would "scare his woman" and would finally drive us off in that way.

We moved into the shepherders dugout where I had taken refuge from the storm on that first night. The shepherd who had built the place had belonged to the T. M. Bar ranch and they warned us that we were not to disturb either the dugout or any of the equipment or supplies we might find in it. But we went ahead, moving his things out into a corner of a shelter we had built for our few chickens, thus further antagonizing our closest neighbors. 5 One morning I heard my shpherd dog making a furious racket outside I went to the door and opened it just in time to let the dog run in and escape the lasso with which a cowboy was trying to rope him. They know my husband was gone all day caring for his flock of sheep, and they were trying to frighten me by abusing my dog. The cowboy was coming so fast that he was barely able to stop his horse in time to keep him from coming right into my dugout. He rode away without a word from either of us, but that night when my husband came home, I told him all about it and he said he would see that I was ready for such a visit next time. He loaded up his big winchester for me and placed it right by the door with instructions to use it if I needed to. The next day I heard the dog barking again and when I looked out I saw the cowboy was luring him away from the house by making him chase his horse. When he thought he was far enough away from the houses he whirled his horse and began to chase the dog, his rope turning above his head. The dog beat him to the dugout, however, and when he came up to the door he dismounted. I was ready for him. I picked up my gun and pointed it at him. The [Then?] I said; "Young man, do you think you are any part of a gentlemen? If you do, you will get yourself across

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to the other side of this canyon and stay there, or I'll fill you full of lead." That cowboy never bothered me again, although they annoyed us when ever possible.

The weeks in our dugout home grew quickly into years. We had little contact with the outside world. I never saw a woman for months at a time. We got our mail at Uncle Hank Smith's in those days. The Rock House was the center for any commerce with the outside world. He was the Indian Agent for that territory and we often saw tall, gaunt indians walking down through the hills of the canyon, on their way to see Uncle Hank and get passes to other reservations. We did see a few tepees which had survived the passing wars [?], on some of our excursions through the 6 country. They were strongly made of buffalo hides and looked as though they might last forever but they finally disappeared, some of them, no doubt, being torn down by prospectors passing through the country.

We had lived there about three years when a preacher came into our country. He was a little preacher the name of Duncan and he was a [methodist?] Circuit Rider. Word was sent out through all the region round about that we were going to have a camp meeting. People were few and far between and about thirty people in all attended that meeting. They came from Crosby, Dickens, Motley and Floyd Counties. Some of the Quakers from the old settlement of Estacado came also to help us with the meeting. We all got together and built a beautiful little tree arbor down in the canyon by the river. It was a wonderful thing to all of us to be able to mix and mingle with other people again. I especially enjoyed two of the Quaker girls who were about my own age; I was a very young woman still and I had many long lonely days of solitude behind me in the three years since I had come to my new home. We would go off down the river between services and talk and pick the wild plums and currants and algerita berries from which we would make jelly for the winter months.

There was one incident which happened during this meeting which I am sure none of those present will ever manage to entirely forget. I had been glad to extend the hospitality of our humble home to all of the visiting people we could accomodate, and my supplies,

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which had not allowed for such an emergency, were running low. It was nearly time for one of the trips to Colorado City which the men made twice a year, to take down the crop of wool and bring back six months provision of flour, sugar, mollasses and coffee with whatever things were considered indispensable to this primitive way of living. I had several guests that morning for breakfast and 7 [?] 7

I had put forth my best efforts and [most?] of my remaining supplies to make it as nice as I could for them. But just as I had put it all on the table and turned to call my company in, I noticed that dirt was falling from the ceiling above. As I looked, the dirt fell faster, and then in a cascade that completely covered my table. My husband was standing in the door of the dugout and saw what was happening, and as we looked, we saw the hind leg of a big steer come through the top of our dugout. He had wandered down from the caprock above and had fallen through our roof. Well, of course the breakfast was ruined, but there was nothing to do but face the situation as we had faced countless others. Arthur said, "Mother, what are we going to do?" I said, "Why get a shovel and let's unload this dirt" and that was the only thing we could do, except rescue the steer and repair the roof.

My husband's brother, Wood Duncan, had settled some miles up the canyon from us. He was very kind to us and helped us over many hard places. I shall never forget him and his old sour dough bucket which always went with him on his sheep herding expeditions. He was a good cook and was always cook for the outfit when they all got together during shearing [timeo?] or on other occasions which demanded the services of more than one man. When he killed a sheep, he always brought us a "Ham of mutton". About the only kind of pies we could have in those days were vinegar pie. He would buy the vinegar in huge barrels. One day he gave me a bottle of vinegar and I put it on some beets which I had raised in a little garden I had managed to get started. When it came off it was a beautiful red. We had so little color in those days that I thought that jar of vinegar was the prettiest thing I ever saw. One day I had a guest for dinner and I determined to use the vinegar for a pie. He insists to this day that that was the best and the prettiest' pie he has ever eaten. 8 We were always glad to have any company, and to offer food and lodging

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to any wayfarer who passed our way. One day an old Mexican woman riding a burro, and her son, came to our door and by means of signs and grunts asked for food and a place to sleep. We could not understand any of their speech and they could not understand us, but we had them come in, gave them supper [anda?] a place to sleep and the next morning sent them on their way not regretting our hospitality in the least. But more was to come. We began to notice the little crawling things known as cooties hopping out of our clothing and jumping about nearly every place we happened to look. Our guests had left us a generous supply in payment for our kindness. I didn't know what to do to get rid of them, but wood wold Wood told told us to put all the bed clothing and everything movable out in the sun and that the ants would eat them up. I did this but I could not be content until I had washed everything that was washable and had aired them all throughly until we were finally rid of them.

We would sometimes see man or a group of men, walking down a wild horse or mustang. These men were called horse hunters and they caught these wild plains horses by the simple expedient of walking them until they were too tired to go further or trapping them in some canyon from which they were not clever enough to escape. I remember one mustang in particular, which two horse hunters had trapped, or thought they had at least, in a place close to our dugout. He was the handsomest horse I have ever seen, a great dapple-grey stallion. He was almost exhausted when night fell, but he climbed a bluff, a feat which appeared impossible and escaped for awhile longer. I never learned wherher they caught him or not, but these men were persistent and I feel sure that they finally accomplished his capture. 9 Rattlesnakes, coyotes and skunks were our ever present neighbors and we learned to keep out of their way whenever posible possible . Sometimes the coyotes would venture quite close to the house and my small son would seat himself on a big white rock just outside the door, armed with a butcher knife, and announce that he "Would take care of me". Our house was usually security enough from all these dangers. But it was not always proof against the heavy rains. When it had rained just so much, the water would begin to seep through the top of the dugout and I would have to cover the

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bed with a tarpaulin, and put coats over the babies to keep as dry as possible [?] until it was over. One evening after a heavy rain, my husband came in from his day with the sheep and found us so. He stopped in the door, and at the sorry sight we presented, all the discouragements of the months behind seemed to come to his mind and he said in a pathetic way: "See what you got into by marrying me". I gave him a grin and told him that if we never had anything worse than that to contend with, we would get through fine. And we did.

Our first little girl, the first girl baby born in Floyd County, was born in the beginning of our third year on our homestead. She was frail and fair and seemed entirely too delicate to ever survive in such rugged surroundings. Arthur was so proud of her. He called her "the lily of the canyon and the rose of all the plains". We had few of the things that are considered necessary to the rearing of children in these days but they grew strong and [sturd y?] sturdy on what we had to give them. With this increase in our family, I needed another bed for the dugout. I had no material with which to make one except some tow sack. In those days the sacks were used for taking wool to the market, and were much stronger and more closely woven than those of today. I pulled some of the 10 threads from the sacks to use for thread to sew them with, and when I had it all made, I went down to the river and cut me some of the tall grass to fill it with. When I had it all filled, I thought that that mattress, made of clean tow-sacks and filled with new mown hay, was the sweetest smelling bed I had ever seen. This grass, by the way, [?] grew in profusion in the lakes and in the dry season the men would cut and bale it for hay for winter feed. When the grass was cut, you could sometimes see the "Salt Licks" where the buffalo had come down and licked the alkaline spots for salt.

The first three years we spent in the canyon, we had no cows. It was next to impossible to obtain milk for any purpose. So it was that when, at the end of that time, Zack Maxwell, my husbands brother-in-law, came our way, we were almost as overjoyed to see the three cows he was bringing with him, as we were to see him and to have word from home. Two of the cows were his and the other one my mother was sending to me. All three had

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calves, I was so proud of mine that I hated for night to come and take them from my sight. The next morning we were out bright and early, but my calf was nowhere to be seen. It had wandered off down the canyon and had fallen into a shallow well and drowned. This was a [?] real tragedy to me. It took me a long time to get over the loss of my calf. Zack Maxwell, had come to settle in this country and he located in Plainview, the first settler at that place although it did not bear that name until later.

My twin brother, J. J. Day, then came to make his home in this region and settled some seven or eight miles above us in what is now known as Starkey. My mother, a widow, and a survivor of other pioneer days, came to make her home with him. They lived there for many years and for a long time ran the post office, his wife, Mattie Day, taking care of all incoming [???] mail for the entire country round about. 11 One day, when Arthur had gone over to Estacado on / Business, he sent me word [by?] a cowboy that he could not get back that night. Bob, who still made his home with us, was off with the sheep. I had never had to stay alone at night, and I felt that I just could not do it. So I went out, hitched the horses to the wagon, and got ready to go over to my brother's house. But my plans did not work out. The men had taken the bed out of the wagon and had put in long poles for hauling hay. I started out, however, putting my babies back of me on the poles. But they were not heavy enough to hold the poles in place, the poles began to slip out and the babies with them. So I had to go back and spend the night alone. This experience was hardly as bad as one which another pioneer woman of my later acquaintance recalled, however. One night when her husband failed to come home, she went out to look for her cows and when night fell, found that she was lost. She was afraid to stay in one place, for fear some wandering cows might run over some of the children, so she walked all night, carrying the baby and the other children holding on to her skirts. When morning came, she found that she had stumbled, exhausted up to about three hundred yards of her home. In the dark she had been unable to see it. The woman was Mrs. Van Leonard whom many early settlers will remember and who resides in Floydada today.

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As time went on, my growing family needed new clothes. I used to take the big flour and sugar sacks and make garments out of them. Sometimes I was able to dye them and make little girls pretty dresses. For thread I used ravelings from "Sea Island" domestic. These sacks were of a strong heavy quality and made substantial garments. We had to be careful and watchful of our needles of course, for the loss of one was a misfortune that could not be very quickly remedied. I do not remember my own record as to keeping a [need?] needle , but Mrs. D. D. 12 Shipley, an early comer to Floyd County, one told me that she kept and used one needle for seven years.

I made every effort possible to make our dugout home attractive and livable. I nailed tow sacks to [?] the walls and covered them with newspapers. These made a clean surface, on which the light was more easily captured from our one window, and they could by changed as often as need be. My dugout had two compartments, the kitchen and the bedroom or "Parlor". One day a family camped down near us and the lady came up to see if she could borrow my coffee grinder. Of course, I was [?] glad to loan it to her and asked her into my home. She had never seen such a dwelling before, and, since I had put in so many untiring efforts to make it as attractive as possible, I was, naturally proud of it and expected her to make some nice comment. What she said was: "Oh, but isn't it snaky down here". I was too stricken to answer for a [?] moment but I finally recovered enough to say that I supposed it looked that way to her, but that it was the best home I had.

I usually went with my husband to milk the cows. One day when we had finished the evenings' milking and were coming back to the dugout, we saw a skunk on the path just ahead of us. We had never had an encounter with one at such close range. Arthur handed me the milk buckets, got him a long stick and said he would kill it. He followed it for a short distance down the canyon, giving it [?] sharp little blows. Presently he hit it hard on the head. The next thing I knew he was calling me loudly and I dropped the milk buckets and ran to him as quickly as I could to see what was wrong. He had thought the skunk was dead, had stooped to inspect his "kill" and had received a full dose of the "skunk medicine"

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right in the eyes. He was completely blinded for 13 several hours. Later on, in our home in Floydada he was to have [and?] an experience quite as bad. Our cellar door was a trap door, opening only from the outside. One afternoon the children had come in with the news that a skunk was in the cellar. He went down to see about it, with me at his heels. He sent me back for a hoe to kill it with. I handed him the hoe, and then in my excitement, shut the cellar door, leaving him alone to face his enemy in the dark. I soon realized from his remarks what I had done, and I let him out before any serious damage was done.

We had lived in our dugout home for seven years before Floyd County was organized, that land then being attached to Crosby County. My husband was elected the first judge of the county when it was organized and the election held. The polls were held at our dugout and there were nineteen voters. I cooked dinner for them. I enjoyed being in "social life" again quite as much as I had enjoyed the camp meeting years ago. My son was now seven years old and I had three daughters, aged five years, three years and fifteen months, when we moved from our dugout home into town. The town which was the county seat was first called Floyd City. It had to be changed when it was discovered that there was already a town in the State by that name, and they discussed calling it Duncanville. This too was ruled out because of a Post Office already in existence by that name and they finally called it Floydada.

I cannot express the emotions I had when we moved our goods into the town and into a real house. It was only a two room frame house, but it had real windows and doors and wooden floors, [?] and a queen in all the splendor of her palace [?] could not have [?] gloried in her riches as much as I did in that home. I had walked on [?] dirt floors for so long that it took me a long time to become accustomed to hearing the sound of my footsteps on the floors as I went back and forth at my daily work. The children, too, were bewildered and overjoyed at the change in our fortunes. They had never [???] 14 our fortunes. They had never seen such a home before. In this "Palatial" residence we lived,

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entertained such guests or wayfarers as came our way and, when the county institute was held in Floydada, we even boarded some of the teachers.

Lumber for the houses and business buildings in the [?] new town town was hauled down from Childress. There was only one other residence besides ours, at first. The other people moving in lived in dugouts until they could arrange for the building or more substantial homes. The business [?] section consisted of a hotel, two dry goods stores and an open saloon. Court was held in the upper story of the Ainsworth Dry Goods store until a courthouse was built many months later. The first school house was a frame building about thirty feet long, and, there were just about twenty-five pupils for this first school. With the coming of the / Railroad a few years later, more people came in and the town grew accordingly.

We felt ourselves to be quite prosperous, considering our prospects in those early days on the canyon. We had acquired twenty-four head of cattle, a wagon and a team and our small stock of household goods. The things we had brought with us from Montague County had seen such hard usage as to have passed on in favor of newer things. It was necessary for us to reach out and take advantage of every opportunity, no matter how small, that came our way. Our family was large and even with the changed conditions of living in a town where we had neighbors, we still put up with hardships that the present day woman would find it hard to take [?]

Changes came quickly. Our family grew, and we added on to our two rooms until the big old house as it stands today was completed. As the town grew we had advantages for our children far in advance of anything we had known ourselves. The new age was being ushered in. We were able to secure music lessons for our girls as they grew to school age. We owned an organ which was the pride of the household and which was considered the height of luxury in those days.

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My husband, Arthur B. Duncan, was county judge of the county where he established his homestead for eighteen years. I recall the coming of R. T. Miller and his family to Floydada, where Mr. Miller served as the first [?] 15 first county clerk of the county. Another old timer of those first days of Floydada was J. D. Starks and his wife. They [?] still make Floydada their home.

About two years after we moved to Floydada, my husband brought a grist mill into the town and people for miles around would come in to have their milo maize, corn and other grains ground into meal. This grist mill was run with the wind and we did business when the wind blew/ Sometimes my husband would get up way in the night to go grind meal for some fellow when the wind would rise after a still day. With the passing of the mill and other contrivances of the pioneer days, came in the [nw?] new era, bringing its mills, its elevators and all of the kindred machinery and equipment known to modern days for the answering of the needs of man. So must pass all pioneer days as the years bring fulfilment of their promises to the newer generations.

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