OVERLAND TO Oregon AND IN THE INDIAN WARS OF 1853.

With an Account of Earlier Life in Rural Tennessee.

By *Martha Hill Gillette.*

Introduction by RICHARD H. DILLON

I was born in East Tennessee in the year of 1833, the night that went down in history for the falling of the stars. The house I lived in was built by my grandfather in 1812. He sent all the way to Boston, Massachusetts, for the glass used in the windows, which were about seven inches square. Our house stood on a high bluff, at the foot of which was a large spring, and all the water used at the house had to be carried up in buckets from the spring. We put our clothes in sacks and carried them down to the spring, and used a big copper kettle that held about fourteen gallons of water for our boiler. This was hung on a pole supported by forked sticks driven into the ground. The tubs were made of cedar wood bound with hickory hoops and were home-made, and as we had no washboard we placed the clothes on the table made for that purpose and pounded them with a paddle about as large as two hands.

We made soap once a year, never using it until it was one year old. We had a large hopper where we saved our ashes, and in the spring, after the killing of the hogs, the soap making took place.

After the washing was finished came the hard task of carrying the wet clothes up the steep hill to the house, and as we had no lines we hung them on the bushes.

When I was a child every one worked, and the woman's share was none the smallest. The women made all the clothes worn by the men, women and children. After raising the cotton, picking it and sending it to the gin to have the seeds removed, we wove it into sheets, table linen and every bit of cloth used in the house. Sometimes we used flax for the men's shirts and trousers as it wore longer, which was an important factor in those days. If we wanted a plaid dress we colored our warp and filling, as we called it, using indigo for blue, copper for yellow and peach tree leaves for green. The coloring of turkey red was very expensive, so we considered ourselves rich if we had a stripe of red in our plaid.

Our year's wardrobe consisted of two woolen dresses, which was considered quite sufficient. When I was 14 my father

bought me a calico dress which came from England, there being no calico made in the United States. I was as proud that day as any miss is of a silk-embroidered gown.

The men's winter clothing was made in the summer time by the women, from wool from our own sheep. After shearing the wool was sent to the gin to be washed and picked and made into rolls ready to be spun. It was colored with walnut bark. The Sunday garments were dyed blue.

All the sewing was done by hand as sewing machines were unknown. I was eighteen years old before I saw a sewing machine, and that was a little thing about as large as a plate, screwed onto a table. Machines were very expensive and only the rich could afford them. All this work was done by the women, in addition to the housework and cooking for the hired men.

There was no such thing as a shoe store when I was a child. The shoemaker came to our house once a year, making two pair of shoes for each member of the family—a fine pair and a pair for everyday use. The leather was brought from the tannery about two miles away. The shoemaker took up his abode with us, and none dared enter his room unless he were sent for to be measured for shoes. He took his pay in hams and bacons, and corn and other produce from the farm.

The farmers' plows were small affairs, just about the size later used for cultivating. It took an expert to sow the grain, and it had to be done on a windy day. The sower took a grain sack and hung it from his shoulder, and threw the grain out handsful at a time.

When harvest time came and the grain was ripe for cutting, how often I have heard the foreman say: "To the north field tomorrow," and then every available man was pressed into service. As there was no money to pay the men, the neighbors swapped hands, and as the fields ripened, helped each the other. The ripening depended largely upon the location of the field.

I often think of the good fellowship that existed between

the farmers then, and how happily they went about their work. No grinding the men and urging them to work faster, but every man doing his best each day. As a child I loved to watch the men start off to work, and those who carried the scythes were my heroes. They were followed by others, to "bind," "shock" and "cap," for everything had to be done as quickly as possible, for fear the rain might spoil all. When the wheat was hauled into the barn for the threshing, it was placed on an immense threshing floor about 100 feet square, then horses were led around in a circle over it until the heads of the wheat were all tramped off. The straw was then thrown aside and the wheat replenished, and so on, until finished. In this way it took about a week to thresh a hundred bushels of wheat. The fan mill was then rolled in. It required two men to run it, one to feed and the other to turn it. This acted as a separator, the wheat running to the floor on one side and the chaff on the other. The wheat was then placed in a cedar granary to keep out the weevils.

When flour was required, the wheat was sacked and a man would place the sack behind his saddle and ride to the mill on horseback. He would have to wait his turn at the mill if he wanted flour or corn meal, and there was a great deal of corn meal used in those days. The miller took his pay or toll in flour or meal.

When my grandmother wanted to make bread or cake, she would take corncobs and put them in a Dutch oven and let them smolder until they became ashes. These would be her soda to mix with her sour milk.

The greatest time in the country was the husking time. Then it was the corn was hauled in from the field and dumped in two large piles on the ground in front of the corn crib, ready for the husking. The whole countryside was invited to the husking.

The women folks busied themselves for weeks previous, while the men prepared huge barrels of cider for the happy occasion. On the night of the husking, two men were chosen as

leaders, and to determine who should have first choice, a round stick was used and the men played at "choosing up." Hands were placed at the bottom of the stick, and alternately were placed hand over hand to the top. The man whose hand came out on top was the lucky man, and then the fun would begin!

Everything in readiness, the work was begun after supper, and when the corn was all husked, another big meal was served. Fires of huge pine knots illuminated the place, making it as light as day. Great fun and shouting went on all through the evening, each side claiming to be ahead of the other. As the corn was husked several men threw it into the barn, others stood on the inside to keep the way clear. You can understand how everyone looked forward to the husking as the gala time of the year. Everyone helped everyone else, the men and women going from farm to farm until all the corn in the neighborhood was husked.

Another busy time was the hog killing season. My father killed about 100 hogs each year. The meat was salted down in large tanks, the hams, shoulders and sides each being kept by themselves. They remained in these tanks until they were thoroughly salted ready for the smoking, then they were lifted out and hung in the smoke house. We also made great quantities of sausage, putting it into small sacks and hanging it up with the other meat to be smoked. An immense furnace was built in the middle of this air-tight smokehouse, and in this furnace a fire of hickory wood was built each day until the meat was cured.

Large hickory barrels with air tight lids were filled with lard and placed on the floor along the walls of the smoke house, and in another corner we placed a year's supply of soap.

This practically ended the year's heavy work for the men, but the stock raising and feeding and a hundred and one other things that might appear very much like work kept them very busy the whole year round. The wood, for instance, had to be hauled and chopped as hand saws were unknown. In those

days everyone attended Church, whether from religious convictions or for the reason that there was nothing else to do on the Sabbath, I cannot tell. The wealthier classes rode in barouches, with a big liveried negro coachman sitting in a high seat in front. Those of more moderate means would go in a carriage, and the poorer class rode in what is known as the carryall, but whether rich or poor, all had good horses.

The young people usually rode on horseback, but if a young man happened to ride home with a girl, he never thought of going into the house, as there was no visiting on the Sabbath Day.

For amusement, we had husking matches, quilting parties, spelling and singing schools, and last but not least, the regular yearly camp meetings. These camp meetings were looked forward to with great interest, all business was suspended and everyone in the whole country, including children, attended. Each denomination would hold their meetings at different places and different times in the fall of the year. As my people were Baptists, we were with the deep water people. I remember very clearly the arrangement of the baptismal pools on the bank of Pond Creek, one for the women and another for the men.

[The Hill family belonged to a "hard shell" sect of Baptists which practiced total immersion. Pond Creek lies in the Sweetwater Valley of East Tennessee, in Monroe County.]

Beeves were killed and corned, and flour and all the necessary food stuffs were hauled to the camp ground which was located in the woods, a place being cleared for this purpose. A big pavilion was built that would hold thousands of people. The women's sleeping quarters were about 100 feet long, and beds were built into the wall the whole length of the room. A similar room was built for the men. Bed ticks filled with straw served as mattresses, and everyone brought feather beds and pillows.

There were only three denominations at that time—the Presbyterians, Methodists and Baptists. I can remember so

well when a man named Campbell seceded from the Baptist Church and he and his followers were called Campbellites. Later that organization became known as the Christian Church.

[Alexander Campbell founded the church known as Disciples of Christ about 1827. His followers were called Campbellites throughout the mid-South. He also founded Bethany College, at Bethany, West Virginia, *ca.* 1840.]

I can well remember how one fellow got religion in one of the camp meetings. Once I heard a fellow praying in the men's quarters, and as the partition was only about six feet high, I, in my childish curiosity, wanted to see him, and was piling pillows up to stand upon in order to look over when he began to shout. I ran to the meeting place to tell my mother. The fact that service was going on made no difference to me. I began to yell at the top of my lungs, "Jabe Taylor's got religion! Jabe Taylor's got religion!" My mother, who was a very dignified woman, arose and placing her hand over my mouth led me away to the place where the switches grew.

One year my parents decided to leave Tennessee and go west to Missouri to make a home (Missouri was considered far west at that time), so they packed all our belongings in one big wagon and we started on the long journey. Wagons in those days were big clumsy affairs, without springs or brakes. Instead of a brake, a chain would be fastened around the spoke of the wheel to lock it. All went well until we reached the Cumberland Mountains. The team traveled so slowly, my mother took me in her arms and we started ahead on horseback, leaving the two other children with my father and the hired man. We reached the top of the mountain in safety and found shelter with a family living there. Then darkness came on and father had not yet put in an appearance, so mother left me with the woman and started back down the mountain on foot —forgetting all about the wild animals lurking everywhere along the way, and feeling only for the safety of husband and children. After going about two miles, she heard the children

crying and presently she came upon the party, trudging up the heavy grade. My father told her that disaster had overtaken them—the horses had become tired and unmanageable, and had started to back down the mountain. Father had barely time to rescue the little boys before horses, wagon and all went crashing down the mountain side into an immense canyon five hundred feet below.

After resting a few days, my father started back to the old home in East Tennessee to get food supplies and horses and wagon and return to carry us back to the place we had left a few weeks before expecting to find a better home in the far west.

We were hospitably treated by the people who lived in a little log cabin on the mountain top, the only house within miles around. It took my father over two weeks to make the trip, and as the only clothes we had were the ones on our backs, mother had to wash and dry them as we slept. At last we got back to dear old Tennessee and I know my mother sighed with relief when we were safely at home again.

My father's next adventure was to go to Alabama—at that time an unsettled country, more like a wilderness—and homesteaded a farm. The first year we spent in building a cabin and clearing the land, and towards spring we found the supply of provisions getting low. Tennessee was the nearest place where provisions could be obtained, so my father had to go back there again to replenish our supplies, and to get seeds to sow on the Alabama land. As he was returning, he was caught in a great storm which swelled the streams and made them impassable. There were no bridges and the only means was to ford the streams, so he had to wait until it was safe to attempt to cross. This delayed him for many days and things began to look desperate for us.

We were entirely without food, except the milk from one cow, and there was no human being within several miles. Luckily for us, however, one lonesome man happened to ride by, and Mother asked him if she could borrow some corn meal

and would he please bring it to us. He did so the next day, but that night the cow failed to come up, and we were left without any food until noon the next day. I was so hungry I could not wait until she had finished milking then, so I asked my brother to get my little tin cup down from off the shelf. He did so, and I started on the run to mother to ask her to please give me just a little milk. Instead she broke a switch from a nearby tree and very quickly I was persuaded to return to the cabin. Mother was afraid that I would frighten the cow away again and then we would all be without milk, for we had no corral to keep our cow in, and naturally she had to forage for herself.

In a few days father returned and our troubles were at an end so far as food was concerned. The next year we raised all we wanted. We lived in Alabama for about a year and a half, when my grandfather on father's side, who had moved to Missouri, began urging us to come to Missouri, so father, having the pioneer spirit, finally decided to try once more to build a home out west, as it was then called.

We all returned to the home of my mother's father, John Fine, in Sweetwater, East Tennessee, and father and my oldest brother, then about 16 years old, went to build a new home for us. When they arrived in Missouri, father homesteaded a place and he and brother worked hard building a cabin and clearing the land. To add to his income, father started a singing school, where all the neighborhood for miles around would gather at the schoolhouse and spend the evening in singing. He had a beautiful tenor voice, so he was the teacher. He set no stipulated price. The neighbors paid him what they could, and soon other classes were formed until he became very well known throughout the country.

About this time (the year of '49) came the wonderful news of the discovery of gold in California and my father soon caught the fever. He sold all his belongings at a sacrifice, and in company with his sister and her husband, Mr. & Mrs. Kelley and their son, Isham Keith, and my brother, and other immigrants, started across the plains toward this land of gold.

They took what was called the northern route, that being considered the safest at that time, and reached Oregon late in the fall of '50. There was no road open through to California in the winter, so my father and brother got work building a saw mill at Clatsup Plains on the Columbia River.

When spring came my father and his company, stocked with a year's provision, mining implements and a camp outfit all packed on their mules, started once more toward California. They traveled the length of Oregon and down through the Rogue River country, which derives its name from the Indians in that region.

At last they reached Yreka, California. Red shirted, heavy-booted miners filled the one street of the town, called Miner's Street. Great excitement prevailed for fear of not striking the right location for gold; each was telling of his wonderful experiences. Looking out over the Yreka flats and seeing hundreds of men at work, father was undecided where to go; but learning of a place called "Humbug"—(so named by some of the miners who had not succeeded there) he went out to look things over, leaving his sister and her husband [Mr. and Mrs. Kelley] in Yreka—she being the first and only woman there.

[Humbug City, on Humbug Creek, was ten miles northwest of Yreka. Gold was discovered there in May of 1851.]

When father's sister had left Salem, Oregon, she took with her a cow, a rooster and one hen, and surely it was the hen that laid the golden egg, for aunt sold eggs at Yreka for $1 apiece. She had a few dried apples left from her trip across the plains which she made into pies, selling each one-quarter for $1, or $4 per pie. She had brought with her some tin pans, some holding pints, some quarts. Into these pans night and morning she poured the milk from her cow and set them in the shed at her back door, where the miners would come and take what they needed, leaving gold dust in payment. Sometimes they weighed it, but oftener they just poured it into a little bowl she provided for that purpose. One day she made $50 on milk alone.