

ELLEN MILLSAP

LET'S GO TO COLORADO

BY MITCH RULE

Ellen Millsap and her family left their homestead in Chapel, Nebraska in July 1910, "The land in Nebraska, we pulled out of there because of grasshoppers. We could have redeemed that land, but it cost too much, 'cause we had to pay back taxes, and we thought that wouldn't pay. Then the grasshoppers just come in like clouds and swept down on the ground and picked the fields, cleared everything. They came in clouds so thick they just blotted out the sunshine. Of course, I don't remember any of this - my folks told me..."

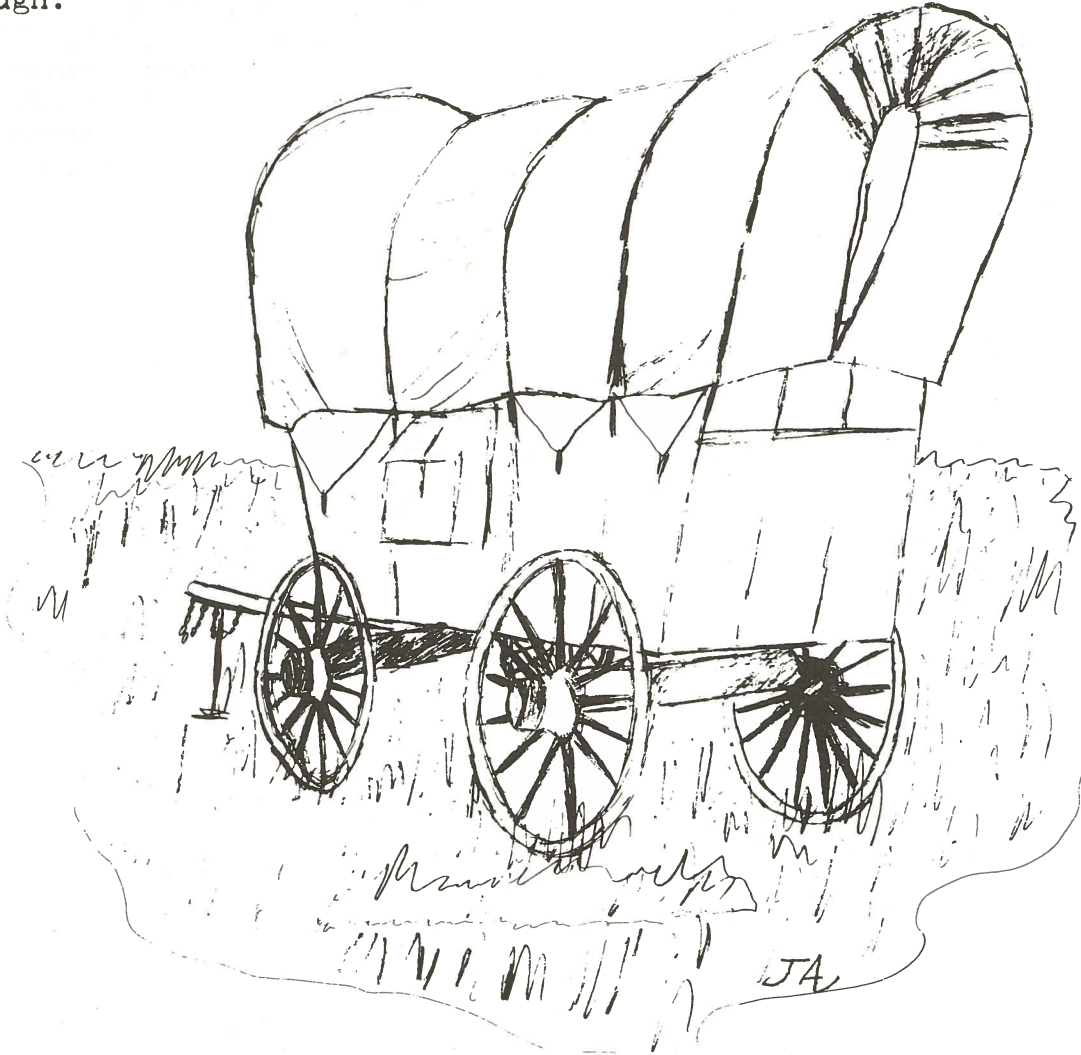
The Lindgrens (Ellen's family) spent the next four years in Glenrock, Wyoming, before Mr. Lindgren thought there was too much snow and declared, "Let's go to Colorado!" As the Lindgrens traveled though Colorado they kept a southern direction and ended up in Texas, near Dallas. Because of the heat and a polio scare, Ellen's father felt the family should once again move toward Colorado. Ellen recalls, "Even the horses wouldn't drink the water 'cause it tasted so awful (in Texas)."

When the Lindgrens left Texas for Colorado they only made it as far as Las Animas, Colorado, when winter set in. The next spring they loaded up the covered wagons again and headed for Julesburg, Colorado.

On the trip from Las Animas to Julesburg Ellen, her mother and the other kids took the train, while Amanda, Ellen's oldest sister accompanied their father with the wagons. "Amanda went with Dad, she drove one wagon, and before they got there they got in a blizzard. It was awful cold. Amanda frosted her cheeks. They tried to keep warm in the wagons, but they couldn't. We others came on the train."



Since I was interested in covered wagon travel, I asked my great grandmother (Ellen Millsap) to elaborate on the details of that trip. "One night we had a thunder storm and the horses just went wild, and they got away. But the one with the hobbles, he didn't get too far before Dad found him. Dad went to one rancher to get a saddle pony to ride around on while we sat there in the wagon waiting. And about five days after that the horses came running back. They were so thirsty - they weren't able to get any water, I guess - sure was a funny thing they came running back though."



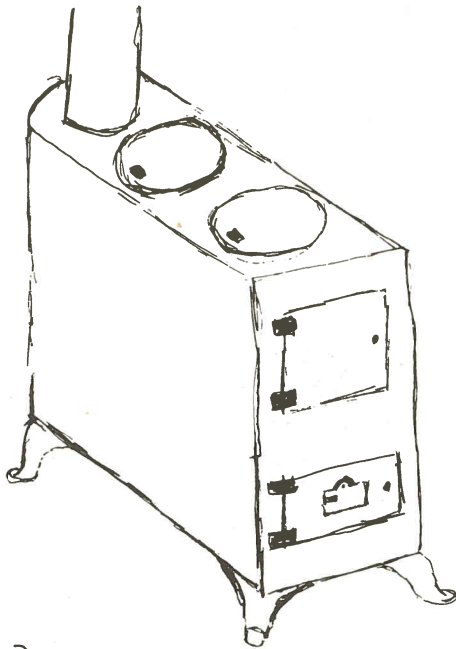
Breakdowns were seldom, "But we had to stop and let the horses rest, and while we did that Dad had some kind of metal thing with water in it to soak the wooden wheels, so the tire wouldn't fall off. That was a big job, but it had to be done." This method would make the wood expand to help hold the metal rim in place. "Amanda went out and helped Dad harness the horses. She was stronger than I was and two and a half years older than I was."

When asked about crossing mountain passes, Mrs. Millsap answered, "I don't remember the names of them. They were very rough though when we came over. They were awful hard to come down. We had to tie the wheels on the wagons together, so they wouldn't slide, they they'd still almost run over the horses. Then we got out and walked. The same way going up, we had to walk up, except we didn't tie the wheels together."

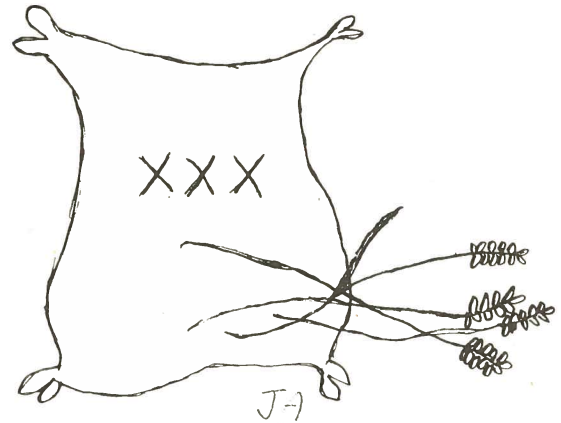
"The roads were really rough, and there wasn't any highways like we have now. All we had was a trail and gates to go through. I don't remember any robberies though (through the mountain passes). Dad went by the sun mostly (for direction). We picked out the best trail and then inquired along the way at big cattle ranches. It was quite a trip!"

Another problem with the horses was shoeing and trimming. This chore should have been done "once a month or so", but was easily accomplished only in the spring or other good weather times. This helped keep the horses from going lame on such a long trip.

I asked about the food for the trip, and Ellen recalled, "Dad would hunt deer and sage hens, and we would walk to nearby ranch houses for milk and cream. I liked the fat ladies the best 'cause they gave me more milk than the skinny ones did." The Lindgrens did not like sagehens, because Ellen said they tasted "terrible", but grouse was okay.



an ole
cook stove



a bag
of oats

For cooking the Lindgren family used an old iron cook stove. "You know, when the wagons were rollin' my brother, Dewey, slept. Then when mother got out to cook on one of those ole iron stoves - it wasn't too heavy. She couldn't do much cookin' on it, but she did her best - while I used to babysit Dewey."

Items carried on the trip for cooking were flour, salt, pepper, sugar and such basics. For the horses they carried grain (oats) a-long, "The nose bag was made out of some kind of gunny sack - they could breathe through that, and we put the grain in it. They ate while going. You see, we had four horses and one colt. We hobbled the leader, and they all followed the one he (Dad) tied on the rope or picketed."

The Lindgrens stayed in Julesburg for the next twenty-five years - until 1938, where they farmed until the dust bowl wiped out their crops. "We had trouble with the drought. We just couldn't make a living, so Dad thought we should move where we could. So we visited Lila Stonebrink (Ellen and Oscar's daughter) who was teaching school at Cow Creek (20 miles southwest of Steamboat). We liked it so well that we decided to move to Steamboat."

Ellen and Oscar Millsap moved to Steamboat and took up ranching and raising horses. They rented a ranch that had a five bedroom, two story house on it. On this place they raised sixty head of horses and also put up hay on the place and made about ten dollars a ton for it. For pay outs they hired a hand whom they had to pay two dollars a day, plus room and board. "They even wanted me to wash for them, but I couldn't. I told them if they wanted it done, they could do it themselves. I had a machine that was run by a gasoline motor, outside beside the house. Electricity had just come in, and the ranch didn't have it then. We had coal oil lamps."



"During the first World War Oscar went to raising horses. We weren't used to many things, but he rallied up quite a bunch -about sixty head. It was free range then, and we'd keep water for them. Everything was a lot of work. Then the horses got down so cheap, you couldn't give them away. We got broke on that deal, and then had a mortgage sale and sold some for ten dollars. They probably went to the butcher shop. Some people made it during those times, and some didn't. My brother stuck to the plains and got rich off wheat, he just kept farming."

Ellen raised a lot of chickens. "I think I ate too many eggs, because we always had plenty. I had lots of customers to sell my eggs to. I also made a lot of butter. I could have had so many customers, the only problem I couldn't have supplied them all. It was hard work to make butter. We tried to sell cream, but it wasn't worth anything. They didn't even want to take it. Boy, I sure had to turn down a lot of customers. I sold most of my butter to Higgen's Store. It was the only food store in town.

"The F. M. Light Store - they had clothing. They've been there a long time, I guess they just added some on - to make a store that had everything. Craig has some pret' good stores still."



Snow clearance has always been a problem in this area because of THREE WIRE WINTERS. "We'd hitch up a team to take feed and water to the cows, but sometimes the horses couldn't get through. Then we had a kind of a snow plow and kept the trails open. They're pretty good about following a trail while feeding, and they kept the snow packed down there. They slept out there on the snow feeding grounds. We never took them inside the barn. But now in eastern Colorado when we'd have blizzards we had to put them in sheds. One bad blizzard that came through there - it was horrible - it lasted three days, and the wind was blowing fifty-sixty miles an hour. Cattle died by the thousands. On big ranches where they had drifted with the snow, they found them froze standing up. Big cattle ranches lost a lot of money. They tried to use the hides, but it wasn't worth anything. I don't know the best thing to do. No matter what you're doing you may go broke."

*Thanks to Gary Kiniston, a future THREE WIRE WINTER staff member, for his voluntary assistance on this story.