

Growing Up on the Roubidoux

## The Autobiography of Ernest L. Christeson

Part Two

Part One of Ernest L. Christeson's autobiography appeared in last year's *Old Settlers Gazette*. Ernest was born November 14, 1884 on the family homestead on Roubidoux Creek. He recounted his boyhood adventures and some shenanigans with his younger brothers, twins Emir and Edwin (1886), and Ansel (1888). A sister, Effie May, was born in 1894. Ernest began his schooling in rural Pulaski County schools, Mt. Gibson and Cedar Hill. Apparently, he was a precocious student. Ernest wrote his autobiography as he was nearing his sixtieth year in March 1943. (Incidentally, a feature of early 20<sup>th</sup> century newspapers was the serial story. This is our serial. Read Part One on our web site noted at the top of the page.)

and took care of the hotel office until midnight. That was at the time when all small-town hotels were doing a big business. If anyone thinks I had a snap let him try it. During the daytime I was busy in school, and whenever I could find time I did my studying at night. It was the only hotel in a county seat town.

As such, it was the center of all political activities, court sessions, etc., which attracted people from the outside. In addition, it was the stopping point for all salesmen, or "drummers" they were called, for that territory. During the time I was there, we had as our guests a number of nationally known characters. Each hotel room was equipped with a large stove, and it was my business to see that the fires were kept going and to look after the personal welfare of each guest.

The next year there was a spring and summer term of school conducted in Waynesville to train would-be teachers and to coach them for the regular teachers' examinations. I managed to attend that term, and when the examination time came around was successful in passing for the county's Second Grade certificate. That was the highest that could be granted without a year's experience at teaching.

The school was in charge of Professor W. A. Lumpkin, and at times he had as some of his additional help his brother John, Ambrose Decker, C. H. Gove, and others, men of exceptional ability as teachers. While

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An ad in the *Pulaski County Democrat* the year before Ernest attended provides an idea of the scope and cost of the normal school term.

it was not a recognized school as far as college standings went at the time, it offered a complete course for teachers, and those who completed that course satisfactorily

By this time [1902 or 1903] I had done about all there was to do at readin', 'riting', 'n 'rith-metic in our local school, so this fall I decided to go into the town school at Waynesville. I secured a room at the old Black Hotel on the public square, and made arrangements to pay for my board and room as general "flunky" around the hotel. [The old Black Hotel is now known as the Old Stagecoach Stop. Notice the building was referred to as "old" in 1903.] I swept and scrubbed floors, carried in wood and water, made fires, carried out ashes, milked two cows and fed a bunch of pigs the whole winter through,



The 56 pupils at the Waynesville Normal School term in 1904 pose in front of the recently completed courthouse where the class met upstairs. Ernest Christeson is second from left in the third row. Ernest's brother Emir is fourth from left in the back row and Edwin eighth. There are five other Christeson kin in this picture. At far right are the professors of the school. In back is Charles Gove. In front at left is W. A. Lumpkin and on the right is John Lumpkin. Courtesy of the Pulaski County Historical Society.

found no difficulty in passing the regular county examinations as they came along. In order to attend I had to ride horseback the four miles from our home daily and to do my studying by lamp light at night at home. Sometimes the weather made this a very severe task for me. Of course, I had to bring my lunch from home. But realizing the handicaps under which I had to work I think I put just a little more into most of my work than did others who had it somewhat easier.

Sometimes children cause their parents needless worry by their thoughtlessness. One day in the early spring I had ridden to school as usual, and the day and evening had turned out to be wintry and rough, ending up in a mild rain and snowstorm. It would, I thought, be a disagreeable trip home. There were no telephones. However, not

thinking of the worry I might cause at home, I stayed all night in town with Uncle Tom's family, for they had now left the farm and were in business in town. The next morning when we came down stairs, I learned that my father had ridden in that four miles on horseback through the storm that night to find what had happened to me. And when he had found out that I was all right had gone back home again leaving me to sleep comfortably through the night. It was too rough for me to ride home, yet he could do that, and more, just to know that all was well with me. What worry and anxiety they must have felt, all due to my thoughtlessness!

Professor Lumpkin's strong points were Mathematics and English Literature, though good in other subjects, too, as well as possessing the ability to inspire one to greater

achievement. While his methods perhaps were not always orthodox, in most respects he produced results. I recall that he used to conduct contests in his classes in mathematics, calling for excessive speed and accuracy in solving unexpected problems from the text. I have taken part in some of those contests and have done reasonably well. One day dame fortune smiled on me and I defeated the braggart of the class in some of his pet work. It hurt him to the core and he made all kinds of "alibis" as to how it occurred, and bragged what he would do the next time. I was offered most anything by the student body if I would take him on again. But I knew when to quit, and the matter rested right there.

Another teacher under whom we worked was Professor C. H. Gove, a very likable man, and proficient. His specialties were English Litera-

ture and the Sciences. I think these teachers molded the minds of a good many of us more effectively than they or we ever realized.

I had been reared in the hills, and had very little opportunity for self improvement, and therefore appreciated to the fullest extent the chance that was mine to go to school. I also knew something of the value of money. In these modern days of luxury and ease I am led to believe that young folks do not appreciate their opportunities, or their good fortune, if it may be called that. Life has been too easy for them and for their parents. It seems to me that when one has been taught the value of honest labor, and of how to take care of himself, he has made a long step in the process of a practical education.

That summer, following the teachers' course in the spring term, I secured a contract to teach the



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winter term of school, six months, in the Hooker district some twelve miles east of Waynesville, on the Big Piney river. The term was to begin in August, and I was to receive a salary of \$25.00 a month. That sounds like little money in these days of high living, big incomes, etc., yet out of it I was able to pay board and room for myself, pasture my horse, and to save enough to attend a spring and summer term at college in Springfield the next year.

Only one or two events or occurrences stand out in my mind for that year of teaching. There was no grading system. The classes went from the a, b, c's on up to history, geography, arithmetic, etc., and there were about fifty enrolled. That is enough to wilt the courage of most any tyro at teaching. I was a beginner, and enthusiastic, so made the most of it.

On that first day, when the First Reader class was called, a young German by the name of Fred Wiener came forward. This was Fred's first day at school, and when the class was called he came forward with all the German confidence one can imagine. I asked him if he could read and he said, "Oh, sure, sure." I asked him to read a certain lesson that I pointed out to him on the page, and away he went, the whole page in German, before I realized what he was doing or before I could stop him. He had it all memorized. That was a "stunner"

for me, who thought I knew all the answers in elementary teaching. But Fred was a wonderful student. I have often wondered about him. There were four or five in the Wiener family, all good students.

This was my first year entirely away from home, and I felt a little homesickness, but managed to ride home every two or three weeks over the week ends. In this way being gone from home did not bother me so much.

I had as Secretary and Treasurer of the school board a little wiry, squint-eyed man, un-named so far as this story goes, narrow-minded and penny-pinching. It was like pulling teeth to get money enough out of him to buy a box of crayon, or any other needed material. Late in October I closed the school for two days in order to attend a Teachers' Convention held in Waynesville. This was provided by law and the teachers were required to attend, being allowed full time on their salaries. At the end of the month I sent in the required regular monthly report, but the usual salary check did not come. Instead, the children told me that Dad was coming over to see me. Sure enough, in the afternoon he came, knocked on the door but would not come in. With a dour expression on his face he said, "Say, I want to see you privately." "Surely," I said, as I pulled the door closed behind me, not knowing what was coming

next.

As soon as I was outside, he began in a slow, drawling voice, "S-a-y, d-a-d b-a-r-n it. You ain't taught one month, yit. You can't put that over and get your check." All the answer I gave him was to step back inside, get a copy of the school law, and show him the necessary section. His eyes flashed everywhere except to mine, and he left rather quietly. But the next morning the children brought my check as usual.

This was supposed to be one of the better districts in the county, however it had an old-fashioned log building of ample size. At one time it had a fireplace at one end, but at the time I went there it had been "modernized" to the extent that it was fitted with a huge box stove and drum, with the old fireplace closed up.

This was a typical rural school during my first years at teaching, beginning as I have said, with the younger pupils with the a, b, c's, and running the gamut of the three R's.

This included the Franklin Readers, the old McGuffey's speller, and texts in Arithmetic, History, and Geography, with emphasis on Arithmetic. I had my hands full that winter.

The next year I was again employed to teach that same school at an increase of \$5.00 a month. That was considered the best in the

county, so far as rural schools went. It is hard for people these days to understand how we existed on such a salary. But out of such earnings from year to year I was able to meet all of my expenses and to pay for all future schooling.

It was during this second year, 1904, that the World's Fair was held in St. Louis. I was able during that summer to get away from work long enough that with a cousin, Paris Christeson, and a classmate, Claude Burchard, we attended that Fair. It was a great adventure for all of us.

And to three boys who had been reared back there in the hills, knowing nothing of the large cities, it was a never-to-be-forgotten experience. The ride on the train, the street cars, and every new building or exposition that we entered on the Fair grounds opened up new vistas to us. It was on this trip that we saw and "heard" our first automobiles, for those first machines were noisy ones. And we saw our first ones on the streets of St. Louis. Later in the season I was able to go again, to visit this same Fair, with two of my brothers, Ed and Emir, the man with whom I was boarding, and one of my older pupils. That trip would make a story within itself.

It was while on this second trip to the World's Fair that a near-tragedy occurred. We five had gone to Arlington, Mo., to take the train to

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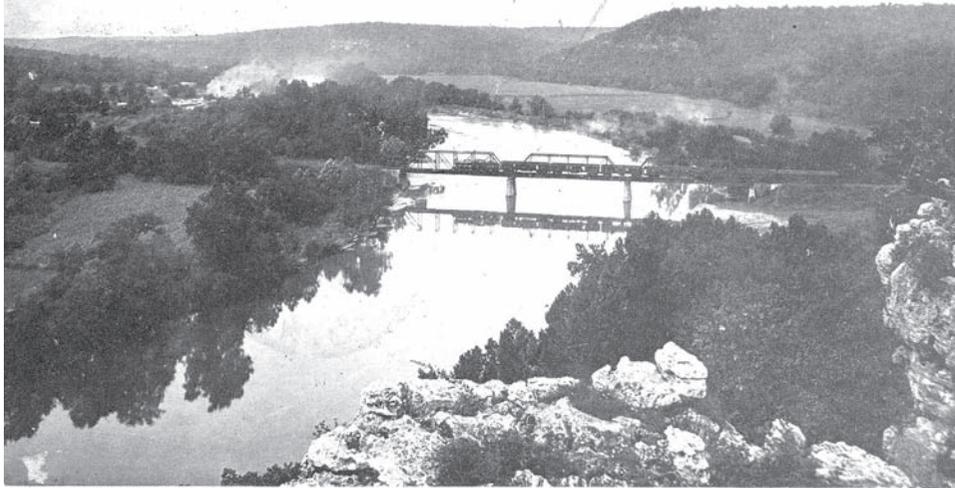
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Below The scene of a harrowing escape—the Frisco bridge over the Gasconade at Arlington. Courtesy of the Old Stagecoach Stop.



St. Louis. Father had taken us there with a wagon and team. We had several hours to wait for the train so occupied our time as best we could.

We had walked out along the railroad tracks to a long bridge that spanned the Gasconade river, and finally out onto the bridge itself. There was a fast train due and we didn't know about it. Luckily we heard the engine whistle, and started to run to get off the bridge—all but one of the boys—that older pupil of mine, one Grover York. Grover decided to drop down onto the pier at one side and let the train go by over his head. However, when he saw the others of us safe, and the train entering upon the bridge, he lost his nerve and sprang out onto the tracks in front of the on-coming train. He ran as none but a scared animal can run, with the train gaining on him and the

engine pulling the whistle cord all the time. There was nothing but the ties under his feet. A single mis-step would have brought the end. And there was no way out save to beat the engine to a place where he might be able to leave the bridge.

But he ran that hundred yards, reached the embankment where we stood, turned and leaped to safety just as the engine went by almost touching his heels. That experience taught us all a lesson.

Later that afternoon we were to learn that the train we were waiting for would not stop at Arlington. It was five miles to the next town, a division point, so the five of us walked that distance that night along the railroad tracks. It was near to midnight when we arrived, and the train would not come in until 4:00 a.m., so we secured rooms and tried to sleep. Not



We can only imagine what wonders these five country boys saw in the city and at the 1904 St. Louis Fair. This is a look down the mile long Pike, offering all manner of amusements. Half of a stereoscope view, courtesy of the Library of Congress.

being accustomed to the noises of the railroad, we found it almost impossible to get rest of any kind. We didn't arrive in St. Louis until almost noon the next day, but in spite of all the excitement, loss of sleep, etc., we enjoyed the next three or four days at the Fair. It was the other boys' first trip to the big

city, too.

Shortly after I left home and began teaching, many changes took place in and around the old home. The old log structure that had sheltered us in childhood was completely remodeled. A 2x4 framework was erected on the outside walls and then covered over

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with siding to look as if it were a frame house. The inside was given a similar treatment and covered with a good grade of ceiling lumber. Another addition was built on to the west end of the building, and the whole structure was raised to two stories. This now gave us a much improved five- or six-room house. The old fireplace was closed up and the rooms furnished with suitable wood-burning stoves. Much of this improvement was done with lumber made from our own timber lands. In a way I hated to see the old fireplace go, for there is something cheery and inviting about an open fireplace that can never be forgotten by one who has enjoyed its warmth, its welcome, and its hospitality.

I have mentioned my enrollment in the Public School in Waynesville and the teachers' courses conducted there during the spring and

summer. These terms were conducted for a number of years. Here I must give credit to the one man who more than any other played a vital part in starting me out in a profession that was to become my life's work, though I didn't realize it at the time. My big ambition was to become a doctor, but I was prevented from that through financial handicaps. Professor W. A. Lumpkin, as has been suggested before, was head of the school in Waynesville, and it was he, together with the efficient help mentioned, who conducted the courses I followed. He took me "under his wing", so to speak, and gave me every encouragement and help it was humanly possible for one man to give. It was under his direction that I finally secured a First Grade Certificate to teach, the highest the county could give. I shall always remember the day I received it.

It had been a hard summer's work, and several of us had vied with each other relative to our class standings. The First Grade Certificate was the coveted high prize, and I wasn't any too sure of myself. I recall that I rode into town on a Sunday afternoon to get the mail, for we knew when to expect the reports on our examination. There were several of us in the post office when the mail was opened, and sure enough there was THE LETTER for me. I wouldn't open it there in the presence of the others, though they begged me to do so, but carried it out to my horse which was tied to the rack on the public square, mounted the horse, and then tremblingly opened the letter. Sure enough there was my FIRST GRADE CERTIFICATE looking to me like a million dollars!! I at once dismounted, went back to the post office, and showed

the certificate to all and sundry, and hung around for an hour or so, proud as a peacock, before going home. That was a "red-letter" day for me.

Later through study at the Normal School in Springfield, I was able to go before the State Superintendent of Schools and to pass successfully the examination for a State Certificate. Professor Lumpkin's influence reached out so strongly among us that at one time there were about a dozen of the Christeson family teaching in the county at the same time, four of them being my own brothers and sister.

While I was teaching in the country school I kept a horse with me all the time for traveling about the community, for my trips home, etc. At least twice each month I would go home, leaving my boarding place some time after supper and

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riding that twelve or fifteen miles across the mountains after dark. There was scarcely a habitation to be passed along the way except where I crossed the Gasconade or the Big Piney rivers. It was a long, lonely stretch of road.

There were also two or three small houses along the high ridges after leaving the river. The final lap of the trip led along a high ridge overlooking the Roubidoux valley, and along here there was no habitation. My cousin, Clifford French, who lived on the old Christeson homestead in the valley said he could always tell when I was going home for he could hear me singing as I rode along that bridle path on top of the ridge a mile or so away. I suppose I was singing to keep up my courage in the dark. It was a long, lonely ride. I had some exciting experiences on some of those trips at night, and some that were quite amusing. No need to relate any of them here.

As has been intimated, to us in the hills travel was a privilege afforded by very few. A distance of one or two hundred miles was too much even to be considered except on rare occasions. In 1901 I was then seventeen years old.

My mother had not seen her old home for years, and she wanted to make a visit up there again. I was considered fairly good at handling a team and wagon, so it was arranged that we should make the

trip up into northern Missouri in an old-fashioned covered wagon. One of her brothers, my Uncle Tom Jones, now lived near us and he agreed to go along. My sister, Effie, now about seven years old, was to go, too.

We set out early in October with a sturdy but slow team of horses, and with our wagon covered over like the old prairie schooner. We had the bottom of the wagon filled with straw and we piled in sufficient bedding and camping equipment so that we could camp along the way. We could travel only about fifteen to twenty miles a day. It took us about four or five days to reach our first stopping point to visit with one of mother's sisters. From there we then went on to her old home place.

Mother had later to take me over all the ground she knew around

her old home, and to tell me of the things she recalled. The old home buildings that she knew had been torn down and replaced by new buildings. There was nothing left as she knew it, except the location itself, yet I am sure it was a pleasure to her in a peculiar way to recall while there old scenes and experiences, and to refresh again her memories of childhood.

I found pleasure in going there with her even though everything was changed and all her folks gone. I have never been able to go back there again, nor did mother ever go again. By the time we had visited all of her relations, none of whom I had ever seen before, we had traveled at least one hundred and fifty miles in the same old covered wagon. It was nothing odd in those days, and we thought nothing of it. The people used that means of

transportation quite frequently when making moves from one part of the country to another.

It was not an uncommon sight to see dozens of similar outfits on the road in a day's travel. I can recall the time when covered wagons were to be seen at most any time of the day along the roadway across the valley from our house, and in most instances all moving south.

Our trip extended through Jefferson City and Fulton, Missouri, as well as through smaller towns. It was an interesting experience to me to cross the Missouri river on a toll bridge. Understand that I had never been that far from home before. The last week in October we headed for home, camping on the road each night. Mother and sister slept in the wagon-bed on the straw while Uncle Tom and I rolled up in our blankets under the wagon. After another four or five days on the road we reached home on November 4, just as one of the worst blizzards that ever struck that country unleashed itself upon us. I can still recall the manner in which it came.

We had traveled over two hundred and fifty miles by wagon and team over roads that today would seem impassable. But we enjoyed the trip. Let me say here in passing that we made that same trip again just ten years later, only mother and I, this time driving with a team and buggy. Our buggy was one built



One of the Christeson's covered wagons used for trips, though this appears to be Ernest's cousin Dolph Christeson and wife eating a roadside supper. Courtesy of Mike Christeson.



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especially for mountain use and was equipped with brakes. Whenever we went those brakes attracted attention, for on the prairies of northern Missouri they had never heard of such a thing.

This time, instead of camping along the way, we had accommodations at farm homes when night time came. Within the past few years I have had the privilege again to go over this same road several times, but each time by auto, and in only a few hours' time. What a contrast to that of our first trip of years before, both as to time and as to road conditions!!

It was while on this second trip to Callaway county with mother that I had a part in playing a disturbing trick on one of my cousins who was teaching in a rural school somewhere west of Fulton. Ever since childhood we had corresponded enough that we knew each other's whereabouts, aims, ambitions, etc., and of the work we were doing. We had never seen each other but once, and therefore did not know each other at sight. Immediately upon going to Fulton I made arrangements to make her a surprise visit at her school during the sessions. Of course she did not know that we were in that part of the state. Accordingly I arrived at the schoolhouse about 11:00 a.m. during one of the class periods, and upon being met at the door introduced myself as a state school inspector. I was cordially invited in, given a seat, and the work went on as usual. But she was nervous. Now and then during the course of the morning I would ask questions regarding the work, the students, etc. The noon hour came and I made to move to leave. Then she did get nervous. Books that hadn't been moved for days were moved and cleaned of imaginary dust, the book case was cleaned out, and a number of other places made spick and span, but she made no move toward lunch. And there I sat. Finally, when I realized the whole lunch hour was

going to be spoiled, I had to tell her who I was. She should have had me thrown out for impersonating an officer!!! And I think she felt like doing it! I learned then that she didn't bring her lunch to school but ate at her boarding house a short distance away, and all the time was debating in her mind what to do with me over the noon hour.

It was, I think, about 1906 that my brother Ed and I got the roving fever and decided to spend the summer in the wheat fields in Kansas. Emir, the other twin, was in school in Springfield. We usually spoke of them as the twins.

One night before the harvest season was really open, we shipped out of Springfield as common laborers, with a carload of others. That within itself was quite an experience! Such a night as we spent on that train!! Too crowded and too noisy for anyone to sleep. But we expected it and were able to stand it. The next morning found us somewhere in the hills in eastern Kansas, and about mid-day we arrived in Wichita. From there we shipped down to Wellington where a friend of ours, David Lewis, was already employed. It was quite a change from our former environment. Back home it was all hills and valleys, poor roads, and small farms. Here it was open prairie as far as we could see, good roads, and the whole countryside yellow with

the ripening grain. Before nightfall that afternoon we had hired out to a farmer to shock wheat for him at \$2.00 a day with board, etc., included, only to find that the "etc." meant sleeping in the haymow in the barn.

They did, however, furnish us with all the bedding we needed, and I think I never slept better than I did there on that new-mown hay, with the champ, champ of the horses about us all night. We had never received such pay before so we felt almost as if we were robbing that farmer. We were there several days, and then had to shift for other jobs. We could always find work for laborers were badly needed that year, but it sometimes threw us into some pretty rough company. There were the good and the bad. I think as young people get out in life and away from home they all have to face the problem of a choice of company, good or bad. That is where our training at home stood us in good stead. That is a problem that all young people have to contend with sooner or later upon getting way from home influences. We had a real tryout there in the wheat fields in Kansas, for we came into contact with some pretty rough characters.

I recall that one day one of the men in our crew said to us, "Do you fellows belong to the church?" At that time perhaps we did not,

and told him so, but asked him why the question. He said, "Well, you've been here for some time and we have never heard you swear. Nor do you smoke or drink. So, the fellows all decided you must be church members." That was a pretty good endorsement. Even in those circumstances we found that right attitude and right living pay. We were respected wherever we went. That one distinction seemed to put us in a class by ourselves.

We spent the summer in that territory and over in Oklahoma, moving with the harvest season, and finally when the harvest was done tying up with a threshing crew. One day during one of the hottest seasons I think I ever knew, we were pitching bundles in a low spot in the Chickaskia valley in Oklahoma.

It seemed the sun was so hot we could hardly go through with the day's work. In the middle of the afternoon we sent in word to the boss of the outfit to stop the machine and give the crew a chance to rest. But he wouldn't do it. An hour or so later one of the men on the wagons, as he pitched the last bundle into the machine, threw his pitchfork in with it. He claimed it to have been an accident, but I have always believed that it was done purposely. At any rate, it broke the machine all to pieces. There was metal flying for fifty feet around, with men dodging everywhere to get away from it. We were laid up a week for repairs, and when we were laid up we had to pay our own expenses.

It was an unfortunate summer for us in a financial way, for it was one of the rainiest seasons that part of Kansas had known for years, and we were able to work only a few days at a time. Sometimes we'd be laid up for almost a week at a time.

We lost so much time that it took all of our earnings to pay for our living expenses. Some time late in July we finally gave it up, withdrew what money we had in the bank



Horse-drawn binders working a Kansas wheat field, ca. 1910. Courtesy of Jan and Terry Primas



to call hogs loudly enough to be heard for a half-mile, as if that were his purpose in the woods. I doubt if there was a hog within ten miles of us. He was an Ozark Mountains moonshiner, and he had mistaken us for some of his customers.

The mail to Thomasville was brought in on horseback and usually arrived about six-thirty in the evening. I was boarding about a mile from town and would usually walk down in the dark to get the mail.

In so doing I had to pass an old cemetery about which there were some eerie tales told. One night as I went down it was as dark as the proverbial “stack of black cats”, and there was a fine mist of rain in the air. I couldn’t see the roadway but had to walk somewhat by guess and intuition. As I was passing the cemetery I got to thinking of some of the ghost tales I had heard, and then all at once I had a feeling that there was something in the road immediately in front of me. I can’t explain it. I was scared!! But what could I do? Yell? No, that wouldn’t help. But reflexively, I put out my hands to ward off whatever danger might be in the way, and in so doing put them, of all things, squarely on the sides of an old wet cow!! That is one time my hair stood straight up. But I realized at once what it was and came out of it all right. Boy was I scared! I have often wondered what might have been the result had I blundered directly into the cow without this premoni-

tion.

It was in the summer before my last year in Alton that I made a trip to Niagara Falls. That was interesting and educational. A story of the trip is not called for here, but I will say that I went on an excursion train from St. Louis, to Cleveland, Ohio, and Buffalo, N. Y., and visited all of the interesting places around the Falls, including the old forts, battle grounds, etc. On the last day before leaving I took a steamer trip down the Niagara river and across Lake Ontario to Toronto, Canada. I had several hours in Toronto and among other places visited the House of Parliament. I found a keen delight in actually sitting in the speaker’s chair. One scene I recall was of the hundreds of people of all nationalities lying in the parks and on the boulevards who I was told had come there to enter the United States and had been denied admission. It was a very beautiful day in Toronto, but hot. I enjoyed the cool trip back across the lake to Niagara Falls.

I have spoken several times of attending the summer terms of school at Waynesville and of later attending the Normal School in Springfield. The two are for me closely related. Perhaps a further word here might not be out of place even though we have to go back a few years in our story. There were several of us boys who grew up together in this country school and who became interested later on in continuing our school work. I

was one of them, of course. There were two of my brothers, Ed and Emir; two cousins, Alf and Dolf Christeson; and two old school-mates of earlier days, David Lewis and Harry Wallace. One summer about 1905 or 1906 we all decided to go to school in Waynesville together and to do our own house-keeping, in other words to “bach” for a spell. We had all been taught at home how to cook and to clean and to care for a house, so we didn’t mind the prospect. It was just another adventure for us all, and we were enthusiastic in our preparation for it.

Accordingly we found two small cabins about a mile and a half from town, and were successful in renting them, and moved in early in the spring. All of our equipment we brought from home, and most of our food was brought from there also. Each one of us was allotted a certain kind of work to be done each week and each one was held strictly accountable for that work. All of the others would see to that. It was an interesting experience for us, and we got along fine, five of us in one cabin, and two in the other. The cabins were right on the bank of the creek, so we were able to enjoy the water frequently. We found time, too, for baseball after school, and other interesting activities.

We did a good spring’s work in school, for each one realized the

value of it. At the same time we took part in most all of the school’s activities— picnics, social affairs, baseball, etc.

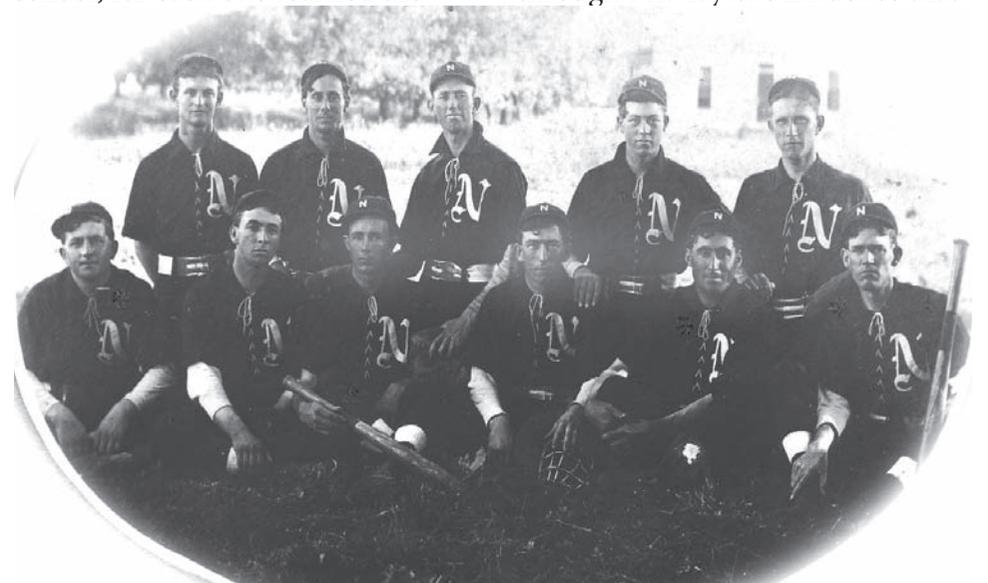
Two or three of us played on the school baseball team in several closely contested games. However, we were far enough from town that we were not embroiled in most of the town’s excitement, nor in things to distract us from our work. Those of us who did not already have certificates to teach received them this summer at examination time. That fall found us all teaching in various communities in the county, each with his own problems to solve. Each one finally drifted into his chosen line of work, and so it has continued—teachers, bankers, farmers, merchants, doctors, etc. Such is life. We have never been able again to get that bunch together even for a visit.

Though still youngsters at that time, we enjoyed having a good time; however, we all knew something of the value of both time and money. Even at this time we were all paying our own expenses, for our parents were not in a position to help us very much.

J. A. Taylor was then president of the old Springfield Normal as it was then called, and was connected in a general way with the work in Waynesville. I think he delivered the closing address that year. It was through Mr. Taylor’s influence that



Toronto’s House of Parliament. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.



The Normal School baseball team at some point. Ernest’s cousin Dolf Christeson is fourth from left in the front row. Courtesy of Mike Christeson.



The Springfield Normal School was founded in 1894 by J. A. Taylor as a private teacher training institution. In its final year of operation, 1905, before merging with the newly chartered state normal school, there were 700 students enrolled in its courses.

most of us at one time or another went to Springfield. It was a new life for us to get that far from home and to go to college, especially since we did not feel that we were dependent upon someone else.

Probably no need to relate any of our experiences while we were there in school for they were just about the same as those of any other college boy. Of course, we had our difficulties, and our share of hard work. We were taught in those days to study at home, and I have spent many nights burning the midnight oil that I might be able to give a good account of myself when the testing time came.

It was about 1905 or 1906 that I first went to Springfield. Some of the other boys in the neighbor-

hood had already gone. An old schoolmate of mine at home, David Lewis, was there and had retained a room for me on the third floor of the old Normal dormitory. At the beginning of the summer term, Harley Dye and Fred Brownfield came in so there were four of us there together. We took our meals in the college dining hall. I remember that my course of study included mathematics, history, English, and some of the sciences. But I was homesick, and plenty, before the summer was over. Our window faced north out toward the railroad yards two miles away and where the Frisco trains headed out for St. Louis and by our home. I recall how I used to sit in the window and watch the smoke from those

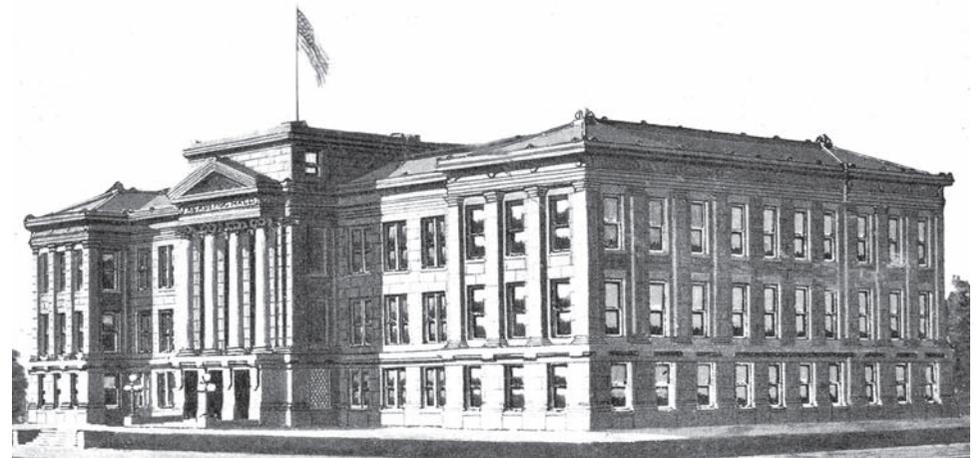
locomotives and listen to the whistle, with all the heartfelt longing a homesick boy can have, wondering what might be going on at home.

[Ernest's attendance at the Normal School was noted in the Pulaski County Democrat. "David Lewis, Ernest Christeson, and Virgil Barlow, three of Pulaski's popular young teachers, went last week to Springfield to attend the Normal School. This is a good school and quite a number of Pulaski teachers attend each year. They ordered the Democrat to furnish them the news." -March 2, 1906, Pulaski County Democrat.]

A good case of nostalgia, or good old-fashioned homesickness, is good for any normal boy if handled rightly, for everyone comes to that point in life sometime when he

must break from too close home ties and stand upon his own. [While Ernest was in Springfield, others of the extended family were educating Pulaski County students. The August 10, 1906 Democrat reported, "The following teachers from in and near town commenced school at the following places Monday: Paris Christeson, Mt. Gibson; Alf Christeson, Lone Star; Seba Baker, Shockley; Addie Christeson, Gospel Ridge; Eunis Christeson commenced at Lee last Monday, and Eddie Christeson will begin at Hicks next Monday." It seems a good part of the county was schooled by the Christeson family.]

I think I had been there in school about two terms when the Missouri State Legislature decided to locate a Teachers' College there. Our school



The new Southwest Missouri State Normal School rented the Springfield Normal School building (above left) from President Taylor from 1906 to 1908 while constructing its first building on the school's new campus. The \$201,393 limestone-faced structure was christened Academic Hall. Courtesy of Jan and Terry Primas.

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under Mr. Taylor offered its facilities and its opportunities. I was there in the auditorium the day the State Board came to give the matter consideration. All of Springfield was very much interested. Pres. Taylor was so excited he could hardly talk from the stage. Later the Board acted favorably and located the college there. I was present at the laying of the cornerstone of the new building and later attended about four terms in the new quarters. That was in 1907, and Governor Folk of Missouri delivered the dedicatory address.

Now comes the time of a great change in the course of events for me. Up to this time I had been going to school each summer and teaching through the winter months. While it gave me a fine opportunity to further my education, it did little toward developing and furthering my financial status. My twin brothers had during the past

two years broken loose from the school room and entered Gem City Business College in Quincy, Ill., had graduated, and now had good business positions. One day during the early part of 1911, after thinking things over for some time, I suddenly decided to quit teaching, so I thought, and to go to business college, too. As I have said, I had been re-elected at Alton, but resigned my place there and went to Quincy. That was a turning point for me for it took me absolutely out of the public school work. I had enjoyed eight years of teaching, but this new decision seemed to offer me greater opportunities.

I enrolled in the Gem City Business College early in June, making a fair start, but due to sickness had to leave about the first of Septem-



The sons of James N. B. and Louisa Virginia "Jennie" Christeson, ca. 1910: front (l) Ansel, (r) Ernest; back (l) Emir, (r) Edwin. Emir and Edwin were part of triplet sons born to Jennie, the third boy passing away during birth, and they were referred to as "the twins." The four boys were all within four years of age of each other, Ernest being the oldest. A sister, Effie May, was born in 1894, ten years younger than Ernest. Photograph courtesy of Mike Christeson.

ber and go home. I spent almost three months at home convalescing, but in a way it was an enjoyable time for it was the first real stay I had been able to make with my folks for several years. I was not able to do much work so spent a great deal of my time wandering about the farm, in the woods, along the creek, hunting, fishing, etc. It was during this time that mother and I made the second trip into northern Missouri referred to before.

Late in November I returned to Quincy and waded into my work in earnest, trying to make up for lost time, finishing the course and ready for examination by the last of March. The day before the examination I received a telegram concerning my brother, Emir, who was working in a bank in Claremore, Oklahoma, saying he was seriously ill and that I was expected to come at once.

Before leaving Quincy, I made arrangements to have the examina-

tion sent to the County Superintendent at home at a later date so that I could finish the work in that way. I went at once via St. Louis and fortunately found my brother very much improved, though unable to work for some time. The bank offered me an opportunity to work in his place, which I was glad to do, and I continued to work there even after Emir was well and back on the job again. That gave me my first real experience in business, that of dealing with various phases of bank work.

*In the final installment, Ernest finds his life's work and the love of his life.*

We extend our appreciation to Mike Christeson of Little Rock, Arkansas, for sharing Ernest's autobiography and family photographs with us. Part III of the reminiscence will appear in the next issue of the *Old Settlers Gazette*, which will conclude this serial autobiography.



The Gem City Business College in Quincy, Illinois, under the ownership and direction of D. L. Musselman, was housed in the Musselman Building. Its 1900 catalog proclaimed it as "the largest and most elegant edifice erected in the United States for Business College work." Musselman began his ownership in 1870, was quite successful, and built this new building in 1892. The school apparently had a wide and positive reputation as it attracted the three eldest Christeson brothers from the Ozark hills. The college provided the basis for their business acumen. The building was razed in 1967. Courtesy of Jan and Terry Primas.

# On the Main Street of America in Pulaski County



1926 route that skirts Hooker Hill.

The Big Piney Cottages were apparently operated on a seasonal basis by owners who lived most of the year in St. Louis. This was not unusual as there were several resorts on the rivers operated in this manner. For example, Meadowbrook, above Devils Elbow on the Big Piney, was first operated by Phillip Becker and later the Bussman family. Becker and Bussman owned businesses in St. Louis and the lodge was open for the summer season. Cave Lodge, near Schlicht Mill on the Gasconade, was operated seasonally and expanded by St. Louisan George Ebersole before another St. Louisan, Harry V. English, bought it in 1918, made Pulaski County the family's home, and opened the resort for business most of the year.— from *Route 66 in Pulaski County* by Terry Primas.

A county road (Trophy Lane/Telecast Lane) heads north from the original gravel Route 66 (Trout and Trophy roads) through Hooker. It leads to the confluence of the Big Piney and the Gasconade rivers. The road parallels the river for most of its 1½ miles. Based on the advertisement at right, Big Piney Cottages were at the intersection of the county road and "Federal Highway 66." That location today is shaded by an elevated section of Interstate 44. In the image above, Hooker Hill is in the background to the south. This intersection is also as far as you can go in a southwesterly direction on the original

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