A RESOLVE

What a wealth of information about the pioneer days of his young manhood my father must have acquired. Yet he put off writing it up till old age had dulled the memory of it all. By his delay how much of interest has been lost to us.

Lest I also procrastinate, here and now I am beginning these "Reminiscences of a Pioneer Boy."

What I can remember I will set down, trusting that you who may read may be able to envision the things in which I had a living part.

Waukon, Iowa, 1928.

Ellison Orr

A POSTSCRIPT AT THE BEGINNING.

THE "BLIZZARD".

When the country was first settled there was a normal snowfall of a strong two feet as it lay in the woods after the settling caused by thaws. Sometimes there were big "January thaws" that reduced that somewhat.

When we went into the woods for logs then, a felled tree would usually about bury itself in the snow. Because of the obstruction to the free movement of their feet it was a not uncommon thing to have the laboring horses "choke down" when loading the logs with a "rolling hitch", or when pulling the loaded sled out to where there was a broken track.

There were then none of the storms that we afterwards came to know as "blizzards". Though I can not give the year I well remember the first of these fierce storms that we afterwards came to know so well.

Early in the morning father had gone to mill - a trip that took all day. There was nothing unusual about the weather that morning to indicate a change, but about noon it began to blow out of the north-west. By mid-afternoon the storm was so terrific that at times we could scarcely see the barn, ten rods away, and it was getting much colder. Frightened, mother had us bring in a big supply of wood and get the stock into the stable and sheds and feed them. We were all worried about father - we had never seen such a storm and we were afraid that he would not be able to get home and might be frozen to death.

But towards evening he came. He said that the track was filled with snow but that with his light load the team wallowed through.

As the years went by we came to know these storms well.

Sometimes they would last for days and people caught out in them were often lost and frozen - especially out west on the prairies.

In those long and severe storms the drifting snow would become mixed with the dirt from the plowed fields and the banks formed from such mixture would be hard enough to bear up a team and loads.

The roads would be drifted full and we would open the fences and travel anywhere through the fields where there was the least depth of snow.

So hard was the snow that it was not a rare sight to see a traveled track running over the top of a fence.

Out west of the thirty-five acres that we bought off the south side of Jimmie's eighty there was a patch of hazel brush with scattering burr oaks. To the west of this for a half mile was an open field.

When the snow driving from the north-west across this field hit the brush it would pile along its west edge in drifts, sometimes ten or twelve feet high.

We boys would go over there, and while one floundered around through the brush and stirred up the rabbits, which were very abundant, the other walking along the tops of the banks, from which he, looking down, could easily see them and shoot all that came within reach of his gun.

Once while I was attending school at Postville, early in the day a blizzard commenced. When school was dismissed I went over by the depot, intending to go part way home on the railroad as the snow there would be blown off the long embankments and the walking easier.

Just as I got to the depot the snow plow came in from the west, closely followed by a passenger train. There was first a plow to throw the snow both ways, built on a strong, heavy flat car in front of a large, strong box car filled with rock.

The "mould-boards" of the plow extended eight feet above the top of the freight car, on the top of which and just back of them, was built a cupola in which a couple of men stood on a bench and peered out through a narrow opening - signaling the engineers.

Behind were two of the heaviest engines belonging to the road. Heavy canvas was stretched on a frame from the cab back over the tender on each.

Behind the engines were a couple of freight cars filled with wrecking tools, and behind them a caboose filled with Irish shovelers to dig them out if they got stuck.

The engines were covered with ice till one wondered how they could move, and if they went in the ditch, as they sometimes did, the crews went with them - they could not get out.

They would buck into drifts from three or four to twenty feet deep till they were stuck - then back out and "hit her again". If they couldn't back out the Irishmen shoveled them out.

Day and night they worked till the storm was over and the track cleared.

The right-of-way was then fenced with board fences and the plows would throw chunks of the hard snow against and over them, leaving a wreck behind.

Sometimes blizzards would last for a week and in spite of every effort rail roads and wagon roads would be blockaded and there was no getting anywhere by either for days.

Of course there was plenty to eat on the farms, but if sickness came, there was anxiety and sometimes tragedy that could not be helped.

REMINISCENCES OF A PIONEER BOY.

In the year 1838 the discouraging, never-ending struggle for a bare existence without hope of betterment, brought to America as an emigrant from the north of Ireland, a middle-aged Scotch Presbyterian farmer, his wife and family.

This farmer was my grandfather on my father's side, Robin Orr, and his wife, my grandmother, was Ann Brennan, of Irish descent.

Among the children was my father, James Orr, then a lad of nine years of age.

In these days of sight seeing and travel, when to cross a great state is only a day's journey, and to take a trip half way across a continent to spend the winter or just for an outing, is considered as a matter of course, it is hard for us to realize the courage it then took to break away from the customs, traditions and associations of generations, and from the uneventful established groove in which their lives ran, and make the long and really dangerous passage to this country.

That was long before the day of the swift ocean liner and they were thirty-one days at sea in the sailing vessel in which they crossed the Atlantic.

My grandfather was the holder of a lease of a twenty acre farm near the village of Castle Dearg, on the river Dearg near Londonderry. On this was a one story, two room house of stone with a thatched roof, in which they lived. There was loft above and the floor of clay was tramped solid and smooth by bare feet.

As things went there at that time they were not considered poor, yet they were not often able to eat white (wheat) bread, or meat, and sometimes actually suffered for want of food. My father used to tell how once when they had only potatoes to eat, and not enough of these, that the children would steal them out of the pot where they had just been boiled, and hiding them in the "cat hole", a place left in the stone wall for the cat to come and go, would then steal outside and eat them.

Yet in spite of mat to his grandchildren seems poverty they had great pride in their ancestry, and as an evidence that they could lay claim to being well related, my father would tell of an uncle that occasionally came over from Scotland to visit them and who wore fine clothes and carried a gold headed cane, and of whom the children evidently stood in great awe.

The oldest son and daughter had preceded the parents and there were other friends and relatives who had been writing glowing descriptions of the new land. They went direct to a large settlement of their countrymen near Seneca Lake in central New York. The little village which was the center of their community was named Tyrone after the county of that name in the land which they had left.

My maternal grandfather, James Ellison, after whom I was named, also came from the north of Ireland, as did my maternal grandmother, Jane Ellison, who was also of the Scotch-Irish.

The knowing ones tell us that my mother's family name was derived from Macalister or McAlester, a clan name, and that when the particular branch from which she is descended was driven from Loupe in Argylshire to the lowlands by the followers of Robert

the Bruce, it became Alison and afterwards Allison or Ellison. Working on the farm with his father and as a "bound boy" for five years to a Presbyterian preacher-farmer, helping to log the great winrows of white pine and hemlock logs that would be a fortune to the present owners if they were on the same land now, and afterwards burning them, going to school and afterwards teaching, my father grew to manhood.

In the spring of 1855 he came out to Iowa. During the summer of that year he worked most of the time for his brother John who had previously settled about three miles out of McGregor on the old Military Road to Fort Atkinson.

My uncle's farm lay at the head of the ravine up which the road ran from McGregor, and that part of this same road just before it tops the upland, is still known as "The John Orr Hill".

Some time during the year my father, who had been looking about for a location for a home, purchased eighty acres, the $S\frac{1}{2}$ of the $SE\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 28, T 96, R 6 west of the 5th P.M., of a man named Riddell.

This man or his brother, so tradition has it, had a young buffalo and a young elk which he had broken to yoke and to drive together. It would be interesting to know if he was able to manage them as they grew older.

In the fall of '55 my father returned to New York state, where, on Jan. 1st, 1856, he was married to Margaret Ann Ellison.

In the spring following their marriage my parents came out to the home which my father had bought. There was a rail road as far as Dunleith (East Dubuque) and from there they came to McGregor by steamboat. Reaching there in the evening my father

left his young wife at the "tavern", where the only guests seemed to be a crowd of rough, drunken men, while he walked out three miles to his brother's to get him to bring her and the baggage out to his home.

Not long afterwards they drove the twenty-five miles out to their new home in a lumber wagon drawn by oxen.

My uncle Sam was the driver and as they were good singers they shortened the way by singing hymns and other songs of that day.

My uncle improved the opportunity to entertain his new sister-in-law with choice tales of the new and very strange country to which she had come. Among other things I remember her telling how he told her that the scrubby burr oaks along the road, in their season, bore beautiful rose-colored blossoms like morning-glories, and made her believe it.

It was a beautiful spring day when she first saw the farm that was to be her home for so long. In all the sixty-eight years that have come and gone since that day she has seen the wild beauty of the prairie and brush land gradually disappear and give place to rich meadows and fields, and the log cabins to comfortable homes and big red barns.

The house was at the back (west) end of the eighty, built there because of the spring which welled up just in front of the door. A log stable stood a little to the north-east and somewheres between was the garden where the bear used to come at night and eat the lettuce, the cabbage, the sweet corn and the turnips.

Often on June nights the whippoorwill would pour out his complaining notes from the very doorstep.

Just to the west of the house was a wide, wet slough across which was a corduroy road of poles. Through the middle of this slough ran a prairie brook of deep little pools connected by shallower reaches. Its banks were overhung by a luxuriant growth of grass and sedges and here and there a bunch of willows.

There were minnows and chubs in the pools for I remember my father catching them once from the log bridge of the corduroy road. Across the years I can see him now standing there on the bridge with the pole which he had cut from the willows and the fish which he had caught.

Across the slough to the west, south-west and north-west was a great tract of young "red" oak brush land that had grown up since the Indians had been removed from the country and the annual burnover had ceased. A yoke of oxen and lumber wagon could be driven almost anywhere through this brush land right over the young trees. Scattered about in this second growth, sometimes singly sometimes in groups, and towering above the younger generation, were the old seed trees, often with part of their tops dead and white with age.

This young forest was much cut up by wet grassy sloughs and small patches of prairie edged with hazel brush, plum patches and groves of white barked poplar.

Just across to the north-west was a slough with a little prairie along its north side of three or four acres which we called the "West Slough". Along the borders of the little prairie were patches of plum trees that bore wonderful crops of delicious fruit, and a little to the north in the brush was perhaps a half acre of prairie entirely surrounded by a plum thicket which was