

FOOTPRINTS

By Sally Mystrom

"THE BOWMAN FAMILY"

Sometime after April 3, 1935, Bob Kiser rode over to the Bowman's place and hollered, "Birdie May had a baby girl and they named her Sally Ann!" This was the Bowman's introduction to me; it would be a little while before I would come to know them. Bill Bowman told me this story dozens of times over the years. I thought it was really great, because NO ONE called my mother Birdie May -- she had given up that name when she left the hills of east Tennessee; she had become Betty or Bee. Still, Uncle Bob would call her that when he got excited. In any case, that led to a lifetime of memories and stories of the Bowman family, whom I loved as my own.

John and Kate Bowman had married in Texas in March 1879. The hell-raising Bowmans were successfully engaged in raising cattle and blooded horses. In 1880, Lewis was born; a few years later Kate became pregnant again--but the child lived only a few days. Around the turn of the century, there was trouble brewing in Texas - possibly because of John's brother Lewis and a rival faction who were battling over range rights and other things. Finally, Aunt Kate had enough. Brother Lewis had been killed, and she was afraid for John and their son, Lewis. They had kept in contact with Henry Haught, who had migrated to the Arizona territory a few years before, and he had written to tell them of the beauty of the new country. Surprisingly, she convinced John and son Lewis, who were partners in the ranch, to sell out and leave the area before they, too, became victims of lead poisoning. (Surprising to me, because I never heard Kate say more than five words at a time!)

In 1903, the ranch was sold, and they left Texas forever. They loaded the wagons, and along with a few head of their best horses and John's mother, John, Kate and Lewis started for Arizona. After several weeks of traveling, they arrived in Holbrook, to find it nothing more than a freight depot. Luckily, they ran into an old cowboy who not only knew Henry Haught, but knew the trail to take to the Payson area. I would imagine that by this time the womenfolk's were wondering where this beautiful area was that they were moving to. Rocks, dust, wind, and an infrequent tree sure didn't seem what Henry had described in his letters. Eventually, however, they arrived in Heber -- then a Mormon settlement of three or four families - and found the change in terrain monumental. They camped that night in a field of wildflowers, and the air was fresh and cool and smelled of pines. The cowboy who had pointed out the Payson trail to John had mentioned that the first couple of hundred yards coming off the rim were fairly treacherous, so John and Lewis saddled up and went to check the trail ahead. Sure enough, the old cowboy wasn't just blowing smoke there wasn't a road or a trail, just a series of huge boulders to bump and slide down the side of the Rim - but the view beyond the rim was spectacular. I've often wondered, while sitting on the edge of the rim, and looking with wonder at the scene below me, what the first settlers felt when they came upon that panorama for the first time. It would be worth all the hardships in the world just to experience that moment in time.

I've heard the tale of the trip down the rim dozens of times, in a dozen different ways, but Frank Gillette tells it best in his book "Pleasant Valley." "Kate drove (the smaller cook wagon) to the edge of the rim and stopped. John adjusted the brakes so all four wheels were locked. Kate gave the word and team and wagon went over the edge. The mules didn't hold back the way they should have from the first. Kate was pulling hard on the reins, but the wheels of the wagon, though sliding, were more like a sled. Instead of the slow creeping gait she would have preferred, they were going in a brisk walk. A front wheel went over one of the boulders and leaned the wagon dangerously. The back wheel went over and the little bump sent both upper wheels off the ground. To John, following on horse back, it was as though time and space had stopped. For an agonizing eternity the wheels rose higher, to a point of no return. For a fleeting moment it balanced precariously, then tipped down hill, catapulting both Grannie and Kate in a high graceful arch to land in the brush and boulders some twenty feet below. The mules spooked and tried to pull a runaway but they only went a short distance, pulling the overturned wagon until they forked a tree. John leaped from his horse and ran to check for injuries. Both women were partially stunned. Grannie got her breath back and rose to a sitting position. Kate soon recovered her breath and tried to rise but she felt back in pain. John pulled her a couple of feet and laid her stretched out on a cushion of pine needles. The pain was in her right leg, high up. Try as she may she couldn't raise the leg or bend her knee and the pain was increasing. It was evident the leg was broken, or at least badly injured."

John sent Lewis on ahead to Henry's place to tell them what happened and to get help. Lewis stopped at Sam Sharp's place and told him what had happened and Sam took off on horseback with some of that era's painkiller - whiskey. By the time Henry and his wife Sarah arrived to help, they'd managed to feed enough whiskey to Kate to numb some of the pain. With John, Lewis, Henry, Sarah and Sam holding and pulling, they managed to set her leg and splint it. They wrapped her in quilts and loaded her in Henry's buckboard. He managed to bump down the trail without further incident. John and Lewis finally managed to get the other wagon and supplies off the top and down to the Haught's.

While staying with the Haught's, as Kate recovered, John and Lewis heard of a ranch for sale in See Canyon, by an old fellow named Isadore Christopher. Christopher had been burned out by the Indians, had rebuilt the place like new, but now he was old and tired. After much bickering and bartering, he sold the place to John for \$2500. (Years later, Barbara Bowman showed me the original bill of sale signed by Isadore Christopher. I've often wondered what happened to that paper.)

So the years passed productively and happily, there on the CI Ranch. Lewis had met Sue Belluzi, a local girl, and they wanted to marry, but Lewis needed a place of his own. A Mr. Hook owned the Thirteen Ranch in Gordon Canyon; he wanted to sell and Lewis wanted to buy, but Hook wanted top dollar for the ranch and Lewis just couldn't raise it. However, after many "discussions" with his father, Lewis finally got John to mortgage the CI to get the Thirteen, which also came with the adjoining property, the Paine place.

Sue and Lewis were married and life was good. Cattle prices were up due to the World War, and Lewis managed to pay almost of the CI mortgage. In the next five years, Sue gave birth to a daughter, Katherine, and a son, Lewis Allen, nicknamed "Bill." When Katherine was five and Bill was four, Sue became pregnant again. Sadly, it was a tubal pregnancy and Sue Bowman passed away. Knowing that Lewis couldn't raise his two children alone, Uncle John and Aunt Kate sold their beloved CI Ranch and moved to the Thirteen. Years passed, Bill and Katherine grew and attended the Gordon Canyon School. Bill joined the Service at the beginning of World War II. When the war was over, Bill and all the other boys came home anxious to be cowboys again. Katherine married and moved first to the fish hatchery and then on to Peach Springs. Bill married Barbara Ashby and moved her to the Thirteen.

Uncle John, who had been my best friend for the first six years of my life, and who had taught me how to cuss, spit, and ride a horse - all the things a little girl should know - had died in 1941. Aunt Kate, still crippled from the wagon wreck and nearly blind, died in 1946. Lewis died in 1964. The ranch was sold. Bill died with his boots on - on the ranch - in October, 1972. Katherine and Barbara have both passed on.

End of the Thirteen as we knew it. End of an era.

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