



at the beginning

How Pap ever was so lucky as to get hold of Old Orchard Farm was a puzzler to me. It must have been one of those providences that just come along when you are not expecting them, and there you are, first thing you know, all rigged out fit to kill.

Pap was raised in the backwoods of Illinois. He was brought up to the cooper's trade, doing a little

farming on the side, on the poorest kind of timber soil close to the village of Cooperstown. Away back yonder, before my time, Paps father left him a forty acre stump patch with a log cabin on it and there he and Mother began to raise a family.

Early one spring a stranger came driving up at sundown and asked could he stop for the night. Of course he could in those days. And after supper it came out, as he and Pap were talking, that this stranger owned a quarter section of rich prairie land out in Iowa, which he had preempted from the Government, and he was all ready to trade it for "most anything that would let him move back to where some folks lived."

He allowed that batching on the wild prairie, five or six miles from the nearest neighbor, was too lonesome a job for him. The upshot was that by daylight next morning Pap and that stranger were on the way to Iowa to see that quarter section.

In two weeks they were back with the trade all made. And, as soon as they could get the papers fixed up and their traps together, Pap, Mother, and the five children (this was before I was born) were off for their new home.

That was the luckiest turn anybody ever saw. It led right into peace and plenty, and the chance of a lifetime to build, and set out, and trim, and cultivate, and generally develop a homestead that not only fed us and clothed us and kept us out of mischief, but somehow formed a kind of reservoir of good will and affection inside us that refuses to fade out.

Old Orchard Farm. It was a jolly good one of two hundred acres in section 29, township 74, range 4 west of the 5th principle meridian, in Washington Township, Des Moines County, Iowa. Burlington, 25 miles away, was our county seat, and seemed to me like one of the greatest cities in the world. It had a population of fifteen or twenty thousand.

Pap started in with a quarter section but when some of us boys got big enough to work steady in the fields, he figured he needed forty acres more to keep us busy. So he bought the forty on the east for \$8 an acre, paid for it with one crop of wheat and had eighty five dollars left over.

And on that two hundred acre farm and the neighborhood around it was about as good a place as anybody ever saw to grow up and have a good time on.