



*grandpa emerick and his son-in-law*

Grandpa Emerick lived about forty rods up the road from our house and I guess he was one of the most wonderful men that ever lived. He was my mother's father and was an old man when I first knew him. But he must have had young ideas, for he was a regular picnic for us kids.

His name was John Emerick, and he was of Ger-

man extraction, although he didn't speak German much. He was a six footer, and nobody ever knew how strong he was. In pioneer days, in Brown county, Illinois, he was one of the men relied on by the community to fight for the peace and order of the settlement. And a lot of fist fighting had to be done then. There was no law of any account, and bullies had to be taken down whenever they got to be too troublesome.

He used to love to relate his early exploits, especially at election times when whiskey flowed like water and as many as a dozen fights — or more — occurred during the day's voting. The people mostly had mighty little notion of what the election was all about, but they were ready to fight for their candidates at the drop of a hat. Grandpa used to tell how, in one of these fights, he disposed of seven men in turn, and the eighth was badly beaten by my Pap. Pap was then a young man and had his adversary down, pounding him on the bottom of the foot when Grandpa broke up the fight. Pap had pounded his victim all over and was just finishing up on the unusual spot. Grandpa never tired of telling that story.

During another particularly exciting election Grandpa was campaigning for Justice of the Peace as usual. Midway in the campaign Sam Griggs came to him with the news that Pete Schomp was spreading lies about him and that he had better do something about it. Grandpa's answer was a hearty laugh. He told Griggs that as long as Schomp confined himself to

spreading lies he wouldn't get excited. But if Schomp ever got to telling the truth, it certainly would lose him the election. That was his way of laughing off the troubles that others worried about.

He was not a great farmer, but put in a good deal of his time selling patent rights, books, and trinkets. He drove a team of ponies and a rickety old buggy which you could hear coming for half a mile. He always called his ponies *tackies*. He hitched up the tackies. He drove the tackies. He swapped tackies. I never heard anybody else call them that, it was just his word, I guess.

Grandpa never had much formal schooling, but he had a good education. He served as Justice of the Peace for forty years, writing out all the deeds and other legal papers by hand, since in those days there were no blanks or forms provided by the government. He kept all his court records, docket and legal forms in pen and ink. He married hundreds of people, sent a good many to jail, assessed fines and settled a whale of a lot of disputes out of court. All in all, he was one of the valuable and important citizens of our little community.

He loved to tell us of his school experiences, limited as they were. In his day the only text books were a blue-backed speller and a New Testament. The speller was a composite kind of book combining reading and spelling with some arithmetic thrown in for good measure. Grandpa always claimed that his schooling was confined to three days: "The first day I forgot to take

my book. The second day the teacher wasn't there. On the third day I didn't go myself."

He and Grandma lived with us while he was getting ready to go out to Nebraska to take up a homestead. It was better than a winter's schooling to hear him tell his stories. He had a wonderful fund of information and the imagination to supply whatever else was needed to make him one of the most interesting men you ever saw.

Born on the Virginia border, he was taken by his parents at an early age to the wilds of Kentucky where he grew to manhood. When that country got crowded he moved to Brown County, Illinois. There he helped to clear away the forest, build log cabins, fight Indians, operate a cooperage and lay the foundations of a civilized community. Here he married and here his children were born, but he tired of this place too and moved on to Iowa. Since the Hawkeye state was then very young, he went through the same kind of pioneering again. Strangest of all, at the age of eighty he moved again! This time he went to Nebraska, filed a claim on a tract of government land, lived on it in bachelor's quarters for three long years and proved his claim at the age of eighty-three. We always claimed him as one of the oldest homesteaders in American history.

Grandma had died in the meantime and was buried at Pleasant Grove cemetery where there was an old country church of their denominational persuasion. Grandpa came back to see us at the end of his Nebraska experience. He got off the train at New London, about

ten miles from Old Orchard Farm, and hunted up one of our neighbors in town. It was the dead of winter so the two started for home in a great bobsled, all wrapped up in horse blankets against the bitter cold. Charlie Kemery, the neighbor, later said that Grandpa was in high spirits, relating many a fine story of pioneer days and his part in them. As they rode along Grandpa raised his hand and proudly pointed to a piece of land that he once had owned. Suddenly and without warning he exclaimed, "I am dying." Kemery stopped the horses and tried to hold Grandpa in the seat, but he was too heavy and crumpled into the bottom of the wagon box. Kemery stopped at the next house but Grandpa was dead. He had come home to die and be buried with his beloved Beckie in the Pleasant Grove lot.

It was a shock to all of us. I remember that I came home fifteen miles from the little country school where I was teaching, to attend the funeral. Although the roads were blocked with snow and slush there was a great crowd of neighbors to pay their tribute to one of the last of the true pioneers. The procession was almost a mile long. The preacher conducting the funeral didn't come anywhere near capturing the meaning of Grandpa's restless life. But of course the preacher had never known Grandpa Emerick and didn't know all the good things he could tell.

Folks used to say that I resembled Grandpa Emerick. It always tickled me to hear them say that, for there never was a man I would rather take after than him.