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OLD SETTLERS IN OTERO COUNTY

By DAN MCALLISTER*

DID I ever tell you about the time they amputated that old Apache chief's arm in Alamogordo? Well, Mom helped the doctor—But first I'd better sketch something of Mom's pioneer background for you, and of course, Pop's. They were my foster parents, Henry and Carrie Sutherland, ranchers of La Luz, Otero County, Territory of New Mexico.

Samuel Henry Sutherland was born in Lawrence, Kansas. He was a posthumous child, born after his father was killed in a massacre of Lawrence citizens by the Missouri Redlegs during the Civil War, or just after.

Mom was born Carrie Findley, in Meadville, Mercer County, Pennsylvania. When she married Pop they moved to El Paso, and there Pop drove a span of mules hitched to a scraper at the Santa Fe grade when that railroad built west through El Paso. He worked from 6 a. m. to 6 p. m. for one dollar a day. And he saved money! Later he and Frank Stuart opened the Pioneer Grocery, first of its kind in El Paso. They made money hand over fist.

One interesting item: That was absolutely the first modern (for that day) grocery in El Paso; and meat sold there was wrapped in paper. Most of the native customers had never seen wrapping paper. They supposed it must cost extra. When they came to buy meat they would wear a "meat ring"—an iron finger ring with a sharp two-inch hook fixed to it—and they would have Pop hang their steak or chops or liver on that hook. They carried home their meat that way, hanging from a meat ring, the flies and dust notwithstanding.

In 1886, for his health's sake, Pop sold his grocery business and moved to La Luz, New Mexico Territory, where he became a cattleman.

It must have been about then that Grandpa and Grandma Findley came out from Pennsylvania. Grandpa had been to

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California in the gold rush days but he hadn't found any gold. Now his health was poor. Grandma was the most resourceful and the most independent person I have ever known; she developed into the best pioneer of them all. I must tell you about her some time. She was a great old girl.

Mom's brother was a gambler. Almost everybody in the Southwest in those days had heard of Eddie Findley the honest gambler. When luck was against him in a card game he would sometimes send down his gold-headed cane to the pawn shop for \$500, though it really was not worth more than a hundred. Always he redeemed his cane. He didn't feel fully dressed without it. A card-shark, yes, but Uncle Eddie was one of the kindest of men. When he died of tuberculosis in Phoenix about 1905 he had the longest funeral (horses and buggies) that Phoenix ever saw. Everybody went. The funeral procession was two miles long. And that's a fact that can be verified.

Many and scary were Mom's and Pop's experiences during their fourteen years of New Mexican frontier life, as I have often heard them tell.

Often in those wild days the Sutherlands had to abandon their beds to sleep on pallets in corners of the 'dobe house where they would be safe from marauders' bullets. The two-foot 'dobe walls were pretty nearly bulletproof. Sometimes they propped mattresses inside the windows to stop the bullets.

Once, during a range war, or as Pop would say, while a lot of his cattle were being rustled, one formidable cattle thief in a friendly gesture reached up to shake Pop's hand, grasped it firmly and pulled Pop out of his saddle to the ground. Pop's six-shooter fell out of its holster. As he lay sprawled Pop reached for that gun, but the rustler kicked it out of his reach. "Oh, no you don't, you sonofabitch!" he said. Then he planted his bootheel in Pop's face and ground it in. The imprint remained on Pop's jaw until he died in 1928 or 1929. The rustler was sore at Pop for complaining to the sheriff about loss of cattle.

For years people in and around La Luz looked to Mom

for help in sickness and distress. Frequently there would be no doctor within twenty-five or thirty miles (quite a distance by horse and wagon or on horseback), and often for months there was no preacher nearer than Roswell or Las Cruces. One exception: Father Majóne, or Maggióne, I am not sure of the spelling. He was a smallish man, Godly, and always on the job in Otero County. Mom was not a Catholic, but she and Father Majóne sometimes "collaborated" on cases.

Mom officiated at births sometimes, she nursed diphtheria and smallpox and arranged for isolation of such cases, and she set bones. She comforted the dying. She sometimes helped lay out the dead and then would preach, or rather just talk a bit, at their burials. Old Grandma Findley was the "preacher."

The Spanish people in La Luz called Mom "Santa Catalina." Mom was a good woman with a heart full of the milk of human kindness, but no one could ever accuse her of being puffed up about it. Of necessity she learned how to do many things that had to be done; and to her, serving people was just part of frontier life.

La Luz was then 86 miles from the nearest railroad. Twice a year Pop would make a trip down to El Paso and haul back a four-horse wagonload of supplies—sugar, flour, coffee, yardgoods, soap, and other staples. Sometimes we would run out of those things. For washing soap, at such times, Mom used *amole*—a suds-making plant indigenous to the Southwest and used by the native people for generations. The brown bark would be scraped off the *amole* roots and the white, pithy fiber beaten almost to a pulp. It made excellent soap.

Though Mom was kind-hearted and often substituted for doctor and minister and even undertaker, she was thoroughly self-reliant and courageous. There was the time she drove a dozen Apache bucks and squaws out of the house in La Luz. The Indians had come down from the Mescalero reservation to trade with the whites, as they sometimes did. They brought old war-clubs, bows and quivers of arrows,

beautiful feather headdresses, beaded moccasins, smoked mesquite boles, and quarters of fresh venison to barter for sugar, lard, coffee, yardgoods, and—if they could get it—whiskey. Usually the Apaches behaved themselves, but on this particular day when they found Mom alone at the ranch house, they crowded up on the back porch, then into the kitchen, and on into the house. Mom got scared, or mad, or both maybe. She grabbed up a shotgun and drove the Indians out of the house and off the place.

And mountaineers used to come down from the Sacramentos to barter with people around La Luz and Tularosa. They brought down eggs and butter and wild strawberries to trade for things they needed. Always they had an abundance of freshly churned butter. They brought it in chunks about the size of a man's head, wrapped in cloths. It was unsalted butter, sweet and delicious. The mountain butter-and-egg men worked up something of a business among us plains people.

There was no such thing in those days as cellophane or waxed paper. Cartons were practically unknown in the plains country. Even ordinary wrapping paper was scarce. That is why the mountaineers used cloths to wrap their butter. Any kind of cloth that came to hand—pieces of aprons, bandannas with the color bleached out, perhaps a white piece of cloth that obviously had been one leg of some demure mountain lassie's old-fashioned drawers, or the tail of a man's shirt. In time that mountain dairy product became known as "shirt-tail butter."

Old Grandma Findley became an even better pioneer woman than Mom, but her energy was divided mainly between two activities: her church and missionary work among the mountaineers, and shooting her trusty 12-gauge shotgun at skunks, chicken hawks, coyotes, wildcats, and once or twice at human marauders. Riley Baker, one of the best sheriffs Otero County ever had, once told Grandma she was the best man with a scattergun in the County.

Some years later Riley Baker was killed by the Yaquis in Old Mexico. He and two other expert gunmen had under-

taken to guide a party of about twenty-five Americans who went prospecting for gold down in the Yaqui country of Old Mexico. Now the Yaquis had never been conquered by Spaniards, Frenchmen, Mexicans, or Americans. They were courageous fighters, and cunning; and they allowed no strangers in their domain. Not even the Dictator-President Porfirio Diaz' *rurales* even penetrated very far or remained for long in Yaqui country. But the five and twenty foolhardy, gold-crazy Americans would not be deterred. The Yaquis massacred the entire party.

When searchers found Riley Baker's body it was hanging impaled upon a tree. His eyelids had been cut off so the blazing sun would burn his eyeballs. Long cactus thorns had been thrust far under his finger- and toenails. . . . His whole body had been slashed and beaten. Riley Baker had suffered a horrible, lingering death by torture.

One evening in January 1896 Colonel Albert J. Fountain and his 14-year-old son, Henry, spent their last evening on earth at our house in La Luz. I was too young to know the score then, but in later years I heard the story told half a hundred times. Colonel Fountain, as government prosecutor, was most active in prosecution of cattle thieves in the Territory. He had just finished his duties in the Lincoln courts and was on his way to prosecute other cattle rustlers in the Silver City courts, the story explained.

While the Fountains were eating supper, the mail carrier, driving a buckboard with U. S. mail on schedule up from El Paso via Las Cruces, arrived at our place. This mail man told Colonel Fountain that he had seen a gang of mounted men back along the road about ten miles. "I wouldn't go on tonight, Colonel, if I were you," he said.

Young Henry Fountain spoke up. "Oh, we're not scared," he said. "I can drive while Papa shoots." An hour later Father and Son drove on into the night. They were never seen again.

Searchers later found Fountain's smashed buckboard and a bloody ten cent piece, the story said. Nothing more. Somewhere near or in the White Sands, it is supposed, the

Fountains were waylaid, shot to death, and their bodies disposed of so well that to this day, more than fifty-four years later, they have not been found.

A few days ago, November 27, 1950, an item appeared in the *Denver Post* stating that Colonel Fountain's Masonic pin had been found recently and that a search-party including Fountain's grandsons, Arthur Fountain and Henry J. Fountain, had made a fruitless search of the area where the pin was found. The party had hoped either to discover skeletons or signs of recent digging. The *Post* story suggests that the strange disappearance of the two Fountains seems destined to remain one of New Mexico's greatest unsolved mysteries.

Personally, I am inclined to believe the remains will be found in the not-too-distant future. Is it not strange that so small a thing as a lodge pin would be found after all these years and nothing else be discovered?—something like a skull and some bones, for instance? Does it not seem that *somebody* planted that pin where it would be found, somebody that hoped the pin would serve as a clue to the burial spot of two bodies? Perhaps that *somebody* is a very old man who wants to get at least that much of the load off his conscience; or, that somebody could be the son, or even a grandson, of one of Colonel Fountain's murderers, who wants to have the mystery solved without incriminating his parents. The one gesture (planting the Masonic pin) having failed to lead inquisitors to a solution of the mystery, it would not be at all surprising if another gesture is made before very long by the same person or persons possessing knowledge of the Fountain disappearance. What with extensive government rocket experimentation going on in the White Sands area, droves of tourists driving annually through the Land of Enchantment, and the usual every-day movements of residents about the countryside, somebody some day will undoubtedly find some clue that will lead searchers to the skeletal remains of Colonel Fountain and his plucky young son. Barring the possibility, of course, that the Fountains' murderers may have burned their bodies.

Just before the turn of the century, when the new railroad was building up from El Paso northeasterly across the Territory and on East, a new town sprang to life near a clump of big cottonwood trees growing between the foot of the Sacramento Mountains and the White Sands. The new town was named Alamogordo. Fat Cottonwood, that is, in Spanish.

A sawmill was erected in the new town. J. A. Eddy and his brother, president and vice-president of the new E P & N E railroad, established a freight yard and built a big roundhouse there. Frank Rolland opened up the first drug store and soda fountain in Otero County, a business that Henry Sutherland was later to buy a partnership in. Manning's *Alamogordo News* leaped into print. A grade school was started. Pierce's Grocery opened, displaying its green vegetables in open boxes set along the wooden sidewalk. Every dog in Alamogordo included Pierce's Grocery in its daily rounds, until one day an item appeared in the *News*: "Every citizen of Alamogordo that we have consulted in the matter has stated definitely, even emphatically, that he preferred his peas in the plural and not the singular." Pierce took his boxes of fresh vegetables off the sidewalk at once.

To haul timber down from the Sacramentos to the Alamogordo sawmill, the railroad built a spur from La Luz up into the mountains. Thus originated Cloudcroft, a delightful summer resort. All draughting and planning for that scenic "corkscrew railroad" was done in our house in La Luz by Chief Engineer Sumners, of Denver, and his staff. The little logging road wound up the mountainsides like a corkscrew, truly. At one spot passengers could look from a car window down upon five other parallel stretches of track on the same mountainside. Unique mountain-climbing engines, with a battery of cylinders mounted vertically on one side and the boiler mounted off-center on the other side for balance, hauled trains up and down the steep winding grades of this, the crookedest railroad in the world!

Now Pop owned many water-rights in the part of Otero

County; he spoke Spanish; and he knew the country well, having run cattle over most of it. The new Alamogordo Improvement Company offered him a position as interpreter, buyer of vital water-rights, and general advisor. He sold off the larger part of the ranch near La Luz and moved with Mom to Alamogordo. I stayed with Grandma Findley at La Luz.

But I used to get a wagon ride down to Alamogordo once in a while, and it was on one of my visits to town that I saw the old Apache chief get his arm cut off.

It was the Fourth of July. Everybody celebrated. Several small bands of Indians rode horseback and on burros down from the Mescalero Apache reservation to see the "doin's" in Alamogordo. They got hold of some of the white man's fire-water. There were fights. The old chief I'm telling you about had his right forearm horribly mangled by a shotgun blast. His friends brought the old warrior up to the doctor's office, the only one in town. It was across the hall from Mom's flat, upstairs over Frank Rolland's drug store.

There was not a trained nurse in town. The doctor had heard of Mom's experiences with sick people, and he asked her to help him. Together they got the patient stretched out on a table. The chloroform Mom administered to that Indian would have put a horse to sleep, but not him! Once, when they thought the patient was pretty well under, the doctor, recently from the East, remarked: "He looks like a tough old *hombre*. I'll bet he's killed a lot of people in his time."

"*O si, si Señor,*" said the old Apache slowly. (Oh yes, yes Sir.) He wasn't out any more than I was, and I was standing there in the door to the next room watching everything that went on.

Without further delay, then, the doctor went ahead and cut off the arm below the elbow. He folded flesh back over the ulna and radius bones and stitched it, and bandaged the stump well. Mom made a sling of a towel to support the Indian's elbow.

Though conscious during the entire operation, the Apache didn't flinch or even grunt. When it was over he got down off the table, put on his big felt hat over two braids of black hair that hung down, and walked out. The doctor had said nothing about pay and the Indian didn't offer any. At the stairs he turned and went down backwards as he would have descended a ladder. Never before had he been in a house with stairs.

Later in the day we saw that old Apache lying in the shade of a cottonwood. A squaw was seated on the ground holding the chief's head in her lap. Another was fanning flies off him with a switch of horse-hair. The towel sling Mom had made was gone, and the stump was wrapped in a red bandanna. A little way off another squaw was saddling up some horses preparatory to their return trip to the reservation.