

## Life on the “Stumptown Bottom”

by

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For anyone who has never lived in a place like this, in conditions and times like this, it will be hard to relate. For anyone who has it will bring back some old memories.

When I was young, we moved from a farm in Edinburg, Missouri to a farm located in River Junction, Iowa. The farm we left was worn out land and we were looking for something better. We had high hopes that we had found it.

The town of River Junction was so named because two rivers met here; the English River coming from the west and the Iowa River from the north. Our farm ground lay on both sides of the Iowa River. On the west side was overflow land, on the east side it was high and dry. All of the buildings were on the east side (house, barn, etc.)

To move our many belongings in those days was a nightmare. It took two box cars, two trucks and three cars to move the Martin Family; parents Tom and Alice, sons John, Harold, Bill, Tom, Art, Kenneth, Cecil and Gene and daughters Alice, Vesta, Lorene and Elizabeth. One married daughter, Myrtle, already lived in Iowa.

There was a lot to do getting moved in. The big boys carried the furniture and secured the animals. The girls put the household items away. The younger children filled straw ticks for sleeping. A straw tick took the place of a mattress. When newly filled they were about two feet thick, but after a week or so of use they were about four inches thick and hard as a rock.

Wood had to be cut and carried in. In 1925 you cooked and heated with wood. That old Majestic kitchen stove weighed a ton but the food my mother cooked on it was second to none.

Mom and the girls shaped the old house up, hanging curtains and arranging our belongings. Things looked bright for the Martin's. We soon found that the ground on the east side of the river had been farmed to death, so we started hauling manure and spreading it over the ground. We cleaned out our ban, hog house and chicken coop. Everything from there went into this land.

The land on the other side of the river was very rich and needed no help so our time until planting season was spent fixing fences and cutting wood.

We always had a lot of harness repair back in the good old days. We relied on horse and mule power. A plow called a Gang Plow took five head to pull; a Sulkey plow required three. We had two Sulkey plows and a Gang plow. We also had a walking plow for small plots.

Well, spring came and the farming began. That gumbo land was hard to work; it resisted but we won out. Finally we had our corn planted and had a short breather until it came up.

Some of this time was spent putting in a large garden, getting our cultivators ready and repairing fences. Our cows were giving lots of milk and the hens were laying lots of eggs. Milking and gathering eggs were a daily routine.

We sowed our oats and began to cultivate the corn. We had five cultivators; four riding and one walking.

By now it was the middle of June and things looked good. The corn was getting about knee high and we were ready to cultivate it for the last time.

Then all hell broke loose. It began to rain and it just kept raining. The river began to rise and they were getting large amounts of rain north of us. To make a long story short, it was bank full. The cows came out of the bottom but the horses headed for high ground. The water spread out all over the bottom and by morning it was about five feet deep on the level.

My older brothers waded and swam after the horses and mules and drove them off the high ground and back home.

Our high hopes were under water but Tom Martin didn't give up. After the water went down we would plant 90 day corn, a type which is usually used as hog feed and is not for the market. So we raised more hogs.

This was one year on the farm. We had two more that flooded out but did get one bumper crop.

Guess what?? The Depression came and we sold corn for 12c a bushel, and our top hogs sold for \$2.50 per 100 weight.

We picked corn by hand using a husking hook or peg on your hand; a slow process compared to today's standards.

In the five years we were there besides the farm work, we grubbed off 20 acres of heavy timber. This means it was dug out so that it could be plowed. For this we were paid \$50.00 per acre and all the wood and lumber. We were also paid extra for any tree we could put our arms around.

We never lacked for food. The cellar was full of canned goods, fruit, vegetables, walnuts and hickory nuts. We butchered our own hogs and beef, cut "Bee trees" for honey and hunted wild game.

In the fall I ran a trap line, trapping muskrats, mink, raccoons, opossum and even skunks. You name it, I trapped it. I sold the furs and always used the money for Christmas gifts.

I could write for a week about our Christmas. It was great food and fellowship. It was like an explosion in our lives and had to last for the entire year.

Our family had seven children still in school. We all went to a one room school house about two miles away called "Stumptown School". Stumptown was a slang name for River Junction. We always carried our lunch with us; school was from 9 to 4 each weekday.

I remember my mother checking our ears and our clothes. Most of our clothes were handmade by her. Our lunches were packed; homemade bread, some kind of meat (beef or pork) or maybe country butter and jelly, a cookie or an apple.

I learned more at this school than at any other. Our first teacher, Ann Kelly was a very good teacher and a hard worker. Then there was Florence McLeash. I loved them both and still do to this day.

This just about ends five years on the Stumptown Bottom. Three floods, two crops, a one room schoolhouse and the worst depression in history.