



*The Funs
of the
Pioneers*

As Remembered by
FRANK McCONNELL



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This book is very different from most of those written about Pioneer life. They deal almost entirely with the difficulties and hardships they endured. This one tells of the fun they had along with their hardships. Their life was not all heavy hard work and tears. They had fun, too.

These stories all took place in the Pleasant Hill and Pierce Chapel neighborhoods.

The Bill and the Widow story was found among my father's possessions.

BILL AND THE WIDOW

"Wife," said Ed Wilbur one morning as he sat stirring his coffee with one hand and holding a plum cake on his knee with the other and looking across the table into the bright eyes of his neat little wife, "Wouldn't it be a good joke to get bachelor Bill Smiley to take Widow Watson to Barnum's show next week?" "You can't do it, Ed - he won't ask her - he's so awfully shy. Why, he came by here the other morning when I was hanging out some clothes, and he looked over the fence and spoke, but when I shook out a nightgown he blushed like a girl and went away."

"I think I can manage it," said Ed, "but I'll have to lie just a little. But then it wouldn't be much harm under the circumstances, for I know she likes him and he doesn't dislike her, but as you say, he's so shy I'll just go over to his place to borrow some bags, and if I don't bag him before I come back, don't kiss me for a week, Nettie."

So saying, Ed started, and while he is mowing the fields, we will take a look at Bill Smiley. He was rather a good looking fellow, though his hair and whiskers showed some gray hairs, and he had got in a set of artificial teeth. But everyone said he was a good soul and so he was. He had as good a hundred acre farm as any in Norwich, with a new house and everything comfortable, and if he had wanted a girl, many a girl would have jumped at the chance like a rooster at a grasshopper. But Bill was so bashful - always was and when Susan Berrybottle, that he was sweet on (though he never said "boo" to her) got married to old Watson, he just drew in his head like a mudturtle into his shell, and there was no getting him out again, though it had been noticed that since Susan had become a widow he paid more attention to his clothes and had been very regular in his attendance at the church that the fair widow attended.

But here comes Ed Wilbur.

"Good morning, Mr. Smiley."

"Good morning, Mr. Wilbur. What's the news your way?"

"Oh, nothing particular, that I know of," said Ed. "Only the Barnum's show that everybody and his girl is going to. I was over to old Sackrider's last night and I see his son, Gus, has got a new buggy and was scrubbing up his harness, and he's got that white-faced colt of his slick as a

seal. I understand he's thinking of taking the Widow Watson to the show. He has been hanging around there a good deal of late, but I'd just like to cut him out, I would. Susan is a nice little woman, and deserves a better man than that young pup of a fellow. Though I wouldn't blame her much either if

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she takes him, for she must be dreadful lonesome. Then she has to let her farm out on shares and it isn't half worked. No one seems to have spunk enough to speak up for her. By jingo, if I were a single man I'd show him a trick or two." So saying Ed borrowed some bags and started around the corner of the barn where he had left Bill sweeping, and put his ear to a knothole and listened knowing that the bachelor had a habit of talking to himself when anything worried him.

"Confound that young Bagrider," said Bill, "What business has he there, I'd like to know. Got a new buggy, has he. Well, so have I, and a new harness, too. And his horse can't come in sight of mine - and I declare I've half a mind to - yes, I will. I'll go this very night and ask her to go to the show with me. I'll show Ed Wilbur that I ain't such a calf as he thinks I am, if I did let old Watson get the start on me in the first place."

Ed could scarce help laughing outright, but he hastily hitched the bags on his shoulder, and with a low chuckle at his success, started home to tell the news to Nettie - and about five o'clock that evening they saw Bill go by with his horse and buggy on his way to the Widows. He jogged along quietly, thinking of the old singing school days -and what a pretty girl Susan was then -and wondering inwardly if he would have more courage now to talk up to her, until at the distance of about a mile from her house he came to a bridge - over a large creek - and it so happened that just as he reached the middle of the bridge, he gave a tremendous sneeze, and blew his teeth out of his mouth, and clear over the dashboard, and striking on the planks they rolled over the side of the bridge and dropped into four feet of water.

Words cannot do justice to poor Bill, or paint the expression of his face as he sat there - completely dumbfounded at this startling piece of ill luck. After a while he stepped out of the buggy, and getting on his hands and knees looked over into the water.

Yes, there they were, at the bottom, with a crowd of little fishes rubbing their noses against them, and Will wished to goodness that his nose was as close for one second. His beautiful teeth that had cost him so much and the show coming on and no time to get another and the Widow and young Sackrider. Well, he must try and get them some how - and no time to lose, for someone might come along and ask him what he was fooling around there for. He had no notion of spoiling his good clothes by wading in with them on, and besides, if he did that he could not go to the Widow's that night, so he looked up and down the road to see that no one was in sight, and then quickly undressed himself, laying his clothes in the buggy to keep them clean. Then he ran around to the bank and waded into the almost icy water, but his teeth did not chatter in

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his head, he only wished they could. Quietly he waded along so as not to stir up the mud and when he got to the right spot he dropped under the water and came up with the teeth in his hand and replaced them in his mouth. But hark! What noise is that? A wagon! And a little dog barking with all his might, and his horse is starting. "Whoa, Whoa," said Bill, as he splashed and foundered out through mud and water, "Confound you horse, Whoa, Whoa. Stop, you brute you, stop." But stop he would not, but went off at a spanking pace with the unfortunate bachelor after him and the little dog yelping after the bachelor. Bill was certainly in capital running costume, but though he strained every nerve he could not touch the buggy or reach the lines that were dragging on the ground. After a while, his plug hat shook off the seat and the hind

wheel went over it, making it as flat as a pancake. Bill snatched it as he ran, and after jamming his fist into it, all dusty and dimpled, on his head. And now he saw the Widow's house on the hill, and what, oh, what would he do. Then his coat fell out and he slipped it on, and then making a desperate spurt, he clutched the back of the seat and scrambled in, and pulling the buffalo robes over his legs, stuffed the other things beneath. Now the horse happened to be one that he got from Squire Moore, and he got it from the Widow, and he took it into his head to stop at her gate, which Bill had no power to prevent, as he had not possession of the reins, besides he was too busy buttoning his coat up to his chin to think of anything else. The Widow heard the rattle of the wheels and looked out, and seeing that it was Mr. Smiley, and that he did not offer to get out, she went to the gate to see what he wanted. There she stood chatting with her white arms on the top of the gate and her smiling face turned right toward him, while the cold chills ran down his shiftless back clear to his bare feet beneath the buffalo robe. The water from his hair and the dust from his hat had combined to make nice little streams of mud that came trickling down his face. She asked him to come in. "No, he was in a hurry," he said. Still he did not offer to go. He did not like to ask her to pick up the reins for him, because he did not know what excuse to make for not doing it himself. Then he looked down the road behind and saw a white faced horse coming, and at once surmising that it was that of Gus Sackrider coming, he resolved to do or die, and hurriedly told his errand. The Widow would be delighted to go, of course she would - But wouldn't he come in? "No, he was in a hurry, he said - had to go to Mr. Green's place. "Oh," said the Widow - "you're going to Green's, are you? Why, I was just going there myself to get one of the girls to help me quilt some. Just wait a second while I get my bonnet and shawl, and I'll ride with you." And away she skipped.

"Thunder and lightning," said Bill, "what a scrape," and he hastily clutched his pants from between his feet, and was prepar-

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ing to wriggle into them, when a light wagon, drawn by a white faced horse, driven by a boy, came along and stopped beside him. The boy held up a pair of boots in one hand and a pair of socks in the other, and just as the wadow [sic] reach the gate again he said. "Here's your boots and socks, Mr. Smiley, that you left on the bridge when you were in swimming."

"You're mistaken," said Bill, "they are not mine."

"Why," said the boy, "ain't you the man that had the race after the horse just now?"

"No, sir, I am not. You had better go about your business," Bill sighed at the loss of his good Sunday boots. Turning to the Widow he said, "Just pickup the line, will you please? This brute of a horse is forever switching them out of my hands." The Widow complied, and then he pulled one corner of the robe cautiously down and she got in.

"What a lovely evening," she said, "And so warm, I don't think we need the robe over us, do we ?"

(You see she had on a nice dress and a pair of new gaiters, and she wanted to show them)

"Oh, my, said Bill earnestly, "One finds it chilly riding, I wouldn't have you catch cold for the world."

She seemed pleased at his tenderness for her health, and contented herself with a long silk neck tie over the seat.

"What is that, Mr. Smiley? A necktie ?"

"Yes," he said. "I bought it the other day, and must have left it in the buggy. Never mind it."

"But," she said, "it was so careless" and stooping over, she picked it up and made a motion to stuff it in between them.

Bill felt her hand going down, and making a dive after it, clutched it in his and held it hard and fast.

Then they went on quite a distance, he still holding her soft hand in his and wondering what he should do when they got to Green's. They would wonder why his coat was buttoned up so tightly on such a warm evening, and what made his face and hat so dirty. Then as they were going down a little hill one of the traces came unhitched and they had to stop.

"Oh murder," said Bill, "What next."

"What is the matter, Mr. Smiley?" said the Widow, with a start that came near jerking the robe off his knees.

"One of the traces is off," he said.

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"Well, why don't you get out and put it on." "I can't," said Bill. "I've got - that is, I haven't got - oh, dear, I'm so sick. What shall I do?"

"Why Willie," she said tenderly, "What's the matter? Do tell me," and she gave his hand a little squeeze. Looking into his pale and troubled face, she thought he was going to faint - so she got out her smelling bottle with her left hand, and pulling the stopper out with her teeth, she stuck it to his nose.

Bill was just taking in breath for a mighty sigh, and the pungent odor made him throw back his head so far that he lost his balance and went over the low-backed buggy. The little woman gave a little scream as he big bare feet flew past her head. She covered her face with her hands and gave way to her tears or smiles, it was hard to tell which. Bill was right side up in a moment, and was leaning over the back of the seat humbly apologizing and explaining when Ed Wilbur, with his wife and baby, drove up behind and stopped. Poor Bill felt that he would rather have been shot than have Ed Wilbur catch him in such a scrape, but there was no help for it now, so he called Ed to him and whispered in his ear.

Ed was about to burst with suppressed laughter, but he beckoned to his wife to drive up, and after saying something to her, he helped the Widow out of Bill's buggy and into his, and the two women went on, leaving the men behind. Bill lost no time in arranging his toilet as well as he could, and then with great persuasion Ed got him to go home with him, and hunting up slippers and socks and getting him washed and combed, had him quite presentable when the ladies arrived. I need not tell how the story was all wormed out of bashful Bill, and how they all laughed as they sat around the tea table that night, but will conclude by saying that they went to the show together and Bill has no fear of Gus Sackrider now.

This is the story about Bill and the Widow just as I heard it from Ed Wilbur - and if there is anything unsatisfactory about it, ask him.

INDIANS

My father's uncle, Lyman Balcom, moved to our part of Nebraska in 1867. He had lots of stories to tell about his experiences and he was quite a person to play jokes on others.

I have heard Uncle Lyman tell many times about going to the Loup River after wood. All of the land along the river belonged to the Indians.

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One day, as some of the men were coming home with a wagon load of logs, a band of Indians came over the hill. Uncle Lyman could understand enough of the Indian language to know they had to unload the wood, which the men did without any argument, but after dark they went back and got it. Uncle Lyman wasn't sure what would have happened if the Indians had caught them with it a second time. He didn't know if they really cared about the wood or just made Uncle Lyman's group unload it as a joke. He said the Indians did have a sense of humor, and told about the time he had company from New York. It was a cold winter day when Uncle Lyman and his visitor, Bill Buffet, went hunting. They got quite away from home and were so cold they didn't think they could make it back, so they decided to go on north to the Loup River and gather wood to make a fire and get warm. The men came to an Indian Village that looked deserted, but as they got part way into it, they were suddenly surrounded by Indian braves. These braves grabbed them and dragged them into a tent where the Chief sat sharpening his hunting knife. Bill Buffet was really scared and wanted to get out of there, but Uncle Lyman told him the best thing to do was just sit still, because the Indians could outrun them and there wasn't anyplace to go anyway. So the two men just sat and waited while the Chief sat and sharpened his knife. When the knife was the proper sharpness, the Chief gave the signal and the braves grabbed Bill and put him on his back on the ground and held him down. The Chief came over, and with great skill and ceremony, painted his face with war paint, then let him and Uncle Lyman go.

THE SEA HORSE

This is the story of the Prairie Creek sea horse as I remember Uncle Lyman Balcom telling it many times.

The sea horse made its appearance sometime about 1870. At that time, the Platte River was running bank full. There was a log floating down the river, the shape and size resembling a large monster. As people saw it, it lost its true identity and became known as the sea horse and people began to watch for it along the river bank.

As Prairie Creek empties into the Platte at Silver Creek, Uncle Lyman's hired man, Lynk Phelps, wondered if the monster might come up the creek. Uncle Lyman decided it would.

Grandpa Rose ran a cheese factory close by, so a lot of the neighbors took their milk to the cheese factory. After delivering the milk, they would all go swimming. In those days, Prairie Creek was quite a stream, and there was always a good swimming

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hole somewhere. It so happened that the swimming hole was about 100 rods north of Uncle Lyman's house. On July 3rd, Uncle Lyman sent Lynk with the milk, telling him he had an errand to do over at the neighbors, and for the men to wait for him to go swimming. They waited until almost dark and when he didn't show up they all went without him. As you can guess, the swimmers were in perfect swimming costume. It was nearly dark when someone looked up the creek and there came the sea horse. The parts most noticeable as it swam were the big horns and the big white tusks. The most scared of the bunch was Lynk. He got out of the water, grabbed his clothes and ran and threw them in the back of the spring wagon. Then he went around to untie the team; but Lynk being in the nude made the horses rare back and the knots got so tight he couldn't untie them. When he reached for his knife to cut the ropes, he remembered his pocket was in the back of the wagon. Somehow, he got the team untied and ran them all the way home. Lynk put the team in the barn and shut the door, then he ran to the house and locked the doors

and pulled down all of the shades. Uncle Lyman's daughter, about five years old, went to the window and raised the shade to see if her father was coming, but Lynk made her get away from the window.

When Uncle Lyman did get home, Lynk told him all about the sea horse. It so happened that in all his haste, Lynk lost one of his new boots. He said he would give anyone ten dollars to go down to the creek and get it, but when Uncle Lyman offered to go, Lynk wouldn't let him. Before the next morning, Uncle Lyman did get the boot, and using a square nail, he scratched it up to show that the sea horse had chewed on it for sure.

There was a big Fourth of July celebration in Clarks the next day and Lynk had a crowd around him all day telling about the sea horse. Before night, the monster got to be forty feet long.

Lynk's description of the monster was so real that a group of the men from Clarks decided to hunt and kill the animal. They asked Uncle Lyman if he would help with the hunt and he agreed.

Well, now the time had come when Uncle Lyman needed help to carry on. The only one he could think of was Lynk. So he told Lynk all about the sea horse; but Lynk wouldn't believe it until he saw it, so the sea horse was revealed and this is what he saw. The neck and head were made from burlap sacks stretched over barrel hoops. The horns were long cow horns and the tusks were willows with the bark off. It was made so that a man could carry it with one arm in the neck so that when he swam with one hand holding on to the monster, it made a rolling motion. This gave the sea horse quite a hideous look, especially when it was nearly

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dark. When Lynk found out all about it, he was as big a duck in the puddle as anybody. Above the place where the sea horse made its first appearance, the creek was something like a horseshoe; it made a large bend to the north then back south. Inside this bend was a cornfield, with the rows running east and west. On the east end of the field was a row of willow trees. There were no trees at the west end of the field, so you could see up the creek for almost a mile.

The day of the big hunt came, and a group of men came from Clarks riding in a spring wagon. Uncle Lyman took them up the creek west to begin the hunt. As they travelled along the bank, they came to a place where the rushes were tramped down and that was where the sea horse supposedly slept.

Lynk was plowing corn, and when the hunting party started down the creek, he tied his team under the willows where they wouldn't be seen, and went down to the creek on the east side of the willows. At this point, the creek bank was high enough that he had no trouble concealing himself as he went up the creek where he wanted to be. When the hunters came to the right place, the sea horse raised its head above the bank and looked around. When the hunters saw it, it disappeared. As the men came up to the place where they had seen the monster, their guns were cocked, and if anyone had thrown a hat out in front, everyone of them would have shot at it. After they saw the monster and it disappeared again, the hunters decided they needed more help, so the hunt was called off until another day.

As the days passed, the stories got bigger and bigger, and more and more people became interested. One of the most interested persons was a professor in Clarks. His great desire was to kill the monster.

It soon became apparent that Uncle Lyman and Lynk couldn't handle everything themselves, so they recruited some men they could trust both in the country and in town.

The day of the big hunt was set, and it was settled that the sea horse must be killed. Because no one could be swimming with the animal when it was shot, the sea horse had to be rebuilt so it would float.

The night of the big hunt was at hand and men came from around the neighborhood and from Clarks. They came in wagons, spring wagons and on horseback. Some of the men even brought lanterns, thinking that the light might attract the monster. At late dusk, the sea horse came floating down the creek. It had been agreed by all that the Professor should have the privilege of killing the monster. When the animal got in range, the Professor

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began shooting. As it got closer, he dropped down on his knee for better aim, but still no luck, Some of the men at Clarks had got hold of his shells and removed all of the shot. Finally, Uncle Lyman said maybe he could kill it. Knowing just where to shoot, he broke the bottles that kept it afloat and it sank into a deep hole. The group tried to get the Professor to help get it out, but he was afraid it might just be crippled, so would not go into the water. Some of the older men went in and found it. They struggled and groaned until they got it up high enough to get a rope on the horns. The Professor grabbed the rope to help pull it out. He gave a mighty heave and nearly threw it over his head. One of the men grabbed it and put it on a horse and hurried to town. The rest of the crowd soon followed. When they got to town there were real bonfires all ready to have roast sea horse.

This would have been the last of the sea horse story if the Professor had gone along with the gag and bought treats for everyone, but he got out of the spring wagon at the edge of town and walked home. The next day and for days to follow, some kid would see him coming, and stick his head around a building and holler "Sea Horse", and the Professor would chase him. Then another kid would stick his head around another corner and yell. They kept this up until the Professor could stand no more and left town.

The sea horse was placed upon the Union Pacific water tower for awhile. The last that was seen of it in Clarks, was on a Union Pacific freight train headed west.

SWIMMING THE CREEK

In 1915, Prairie Creek was never low enough to wade in without taking off your pants if you didn't want to get them wet. Much of the time it was bank full and sometimes it was out of the banks and as much as a half mile wide at places.

We kept our milk cows in Roses' pasture. The only pasture that was not underwater was across the creek, so we had to either ride a horse across or swim. Usually we would ride the horses and let them do the swimming. When the creek was high, either my brother or I would go with one of the Rose boys to get the cows.

One Sunday evening, Ernie Rose and I went after the cows. The milk cows and stock cattle, about 60 head, were in the only forty across the creek that wasn't under water. We had all been to church at Pierce Chapel that afternoon and Ernie was still wearing his good white shirt. Since the pasture was close to the creek, Ernie took off his other clothes, but just rolled the shirt up under his arms and started his horse swimming across the creek.

You can't guide a horse that is swimming, for if you do you are liable to upset it and might drown. Even though I had ridden this one horse across the creek many times, this evening it just wouldn't go in. When Ernie's horse saw that mine wasn't coming, it turned around in the middle of the creek and all you could see of Ernie was his head, so his white shirt got plenty wet. Then neither horse would go in the water, so we had to swim the creek ourselves. Now we were in perfect running attire, and when those cows saw us they put their tails over their backs and stampeded the other way. We chased those cows for a long time and never could get them in the creek. Finally Walter Rose got another horse and came over to help us. When we finally got the cows in the creek, we grabbed hold of a tail and let them pull us back.

LITTLE JOE

Little Joe lived east and south of Pierce Chapel. He was a small man with big banjo eyes and a big Adam's apple; his head always at a slight angle. His arms had been broken a number of times and were never set straight. In his younger days, Little Joe could put his hand behind his back, then reach high enough to tip his hat from the back of his head. He had a peculiar smile, especially when telling a story, and at telling stories he was a master.

One of the stories was about bees. He told about a swarm of bees that flew around his yard and he wanted them to settle, so he hammered on a tin pan and made all the noise he could, which was the normal way of settling bees, but nothing worked. He had heard that if the queen would settle, the rest would follow, so after he had tried everything that should have worked, he got his shotgun and shot the queen, then they settled.

Another time, Little Joe said he went after the cows and there was a swarm of bees on a fence post down by the pond. He could not figure out why they would settle there unless they wanted a drink.

This man always had a large flock of chickens; but he claimed he had never had all the eggs he wanted to eat. When eggs were high he couldn't afford to eat them, and when they were cheap he had to sell them to buy groceries.

Little Joe had invited Drew Chesley and Clyde McLean to his house, so one nice warm evening in late winter, they went, but Joe wasn't home. They figured he was probably up at Jake Inbody's or Burgers, about a mile north, which he was. Drew said to Clyde, "I'll get him home". Drew went out to the barn, got a

large fork full of hay and put it on a snowbank on the north side of the house and started it a fire. This all happened before people had milking parlors, or even barns to milk in, so Jake and Nettie Inbody were milking out in the lot, and Joe was visiting with them when he saw the fire. The reflection on the windows made it look like the house was on fire, so Joe hurried home on foot. As he went, he started shedding clothes. First one overshoe, then the other; a coat, and yet another coat; and finally his cap, all strung along the road.

In the excitement the cow kicked Nettie over; Jake got on a horse and started down to Joe's, but his horse stumbled and he skinned his hands. A man by the name of Zeke, who lived across the section west, saw the fire and he grabbed a pair of wire cutters, got on a horse and went across the fields, cutting fences as he went.

When everyone arrived at the scene, there sat Drew and Clyde in the house smoking their pipes. Well, naturally there were a few people more burned up than the house. Little Joe was so nearly all in they had to take him up to Burgers for the night. When Drew and Clyde got ready to go home, their team and buggy were gone, so they had to walk two miles to get home.

Communities used to have programs called Literaries at the schools, and it was time for Literary at Pleasant Hill School soon after the episode of the fire. Kenneth Dexter drew this story on a long sheet of paper and rolled it on two window shade rollers. Then, as he rolled the paper, he narrated the story for the first talking movie to be shown there.

Once, when a group of men were talking about breaking sod, Little Joe remarked about how nice it was to walk behind a breaking plow and watch the sod roll over. He said that if you got the plow set right, you could go a quarter of a mile without the sod coming apart. Then Joe said, "You know, "I've got a riding gang plow that beats it all to hell".

OLD JACK

Old Jack, as he was know to some, was known to others as Jack, Herbert, or by his full name, Jack Herbert.

He lived alone in a little shack beside his blacksmith shop on the banks of Prairie Creek. Old Jack was definitely not the best housekeeper, and very few people, if any, cared to eat at his place.

One day one of the neighbors was cutting up some meat and Old Jack wanted to help. The woman told him he had to wash his hands first. He said, "I don't see why, I have been wearing my gloves all morning.

When Old Jack grew a goatee, it had too much grey in it to suit him, so he used shoe black to color it. The black didn't stay on the goatee, but it did stay on the skin underneath.

No one ever did anything that Old Jack hadn't done some time in his life, and just a little better. If it were possible to get all the things he had done added together, he would have lived a mighty long time.

June Bessey tells about the day she took her rifle and went rabbit hunting down by the creek, right after reading the book, The Deerslayer. She thought the man in the book had come alive when she saw Old Jack dressed in his checkered mackinaw, felt boots and hunter's cap.

THE BIG FISH

When I was a boy, Prairie Creek was a pretty big creek with plenty of water, and catching fish by hand, or stump fishing, was quite a popular sport.

According to Old Jack, there was a big fish that stayed around some tree roots that had washed out. Old Jack could find it there anytime he went down fishing, but it was so big that when he tried to get it out of the water, it just gave a flop and got away.

Finally, he got an idea and proceeded to carry it out. Old Jack went to his blacksmith shop and made a large fish hook, which he could hold in his hand. He used about an eighth-inch rod, and made an eye large enough for sash cord. One day Old Jack and his neighbor, Dewey

Madison, went down to the creek after the big fish. Old Jack tied a piece of sash cord to the hook and tied the other end around his waist, then started feeling around for the big one. He soon found his fish and felt around until he got the hook in its mouth, but the fish took off for deep water. No doubt Old Jack would have drowned if Dewey had not helped him. After quite a struggle they landed the fish and took it back to the shack where Old Jack insisted they divide the fish. Even though Dewey insisted he didn't want any, Old Jack cut the fish in half from nose to tail so each could have half of the brains.

THE CONTEST

Drew Chesley had quite a large family and they all had a lot of fun. At Drew's, the welcome mat was always out. Often, Old Jack or Little Joe would go up to Drew's for a visit in the evening.

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They'd sit around spinning yarns, and Drew was a master at egging them on. One night when both Old Jack and Little Joe were there, they told stories until well after midnight, and every story Old Jack told, Little Joe topped. The next morning Old Jack went back up to Drew's and said, "You know, that Little Joe is the damnedest liar I ever saw!"

It was easy to get Old Jack started on a story. One time we had company from South Dakota. He came on a motorcycle. We asked Jack if he could install a bearing in the front wheels. Then Jack got to telling about the motorcycle he had once and how fast it was. Jack said he bet an engineer on a fast express train that he could beat the train to the next town twelve miles away. Jack had to cross the tracks three times and the first time, the engineer thought he was going to hit him. The next time, Jack's coat tail was sticking out straight enough to play cards on, and the third time, the engineer didn't see him at all. When Jack arrived at the station, he called the agent's attention to the time. He had beaten the train by twenty minutes.

THE BIG CATCH

One year, about a quarter mile north of Old Jack's shack, there was a deep hole washed out in Prairie Creek, and it had lots of fish in it, mostly carp. At that time, it was legal to have a seine and there was always one in the neighborhood. One day we cut a hole in the ice about three or four feet wide clear across the creek. We dropped the seine in, then went up stream and drove the fish down into the net. You could drive fish by pounding on the ice and by cutting holes around brush in the water, prodding around with a stick. It was possible to get around two hundred pounds of fish at one haul.

Bill Burger was there on the day of the big haul, but he didn't bring anything to take his fish home in. Now Bill wasn't very high up and down but pretty big around the middle. Bill's boy, George, was skating on the ice, and in those days you wore skate straps to keep your skates on. Since Bill was wearing two pairs of overalls, he took one pair off, tied the bottoms of the legs with George's skate straps and filled the overalls with fish. Then, with the suspenders over his shoulders and the overalls with the legs and body full of fish hanging down his back, he went up the creek towards home.

Permission to reproduce "The Funs of the Pioneers" was granted by Mr. Frank McConnell, 95 years young and living in Central City, NE in 1998. He really enjoyed your email expressing appreciation of this peek into the happier/sillier moments of our forefathers.

Mr.
McConnell fell about the time of his 96th birthday in the summer of 1999. He passed away 21 Oct 1999 at the Long Term Care Facility, Central City. He was buried at Bureau Cemetery across from Pierce Chapel - a familiar location as he grew up in that area. He loved collecting the "funs" of life and often spoke at local country schools about pioneer life. If you have enjoyed his publication, please drop an email note to his descendents by way of [Selma Mesner](#).

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