

GROWING UP WITH GREELEY

Mr. Baxter took a last look at his farm, then got into his covered wagon.

"I will not be sad to get away from this place," he said.

"I hope we are doing the right thing, John," said Mrs. Baxter. "You put in three years of hard work to fix up this place."

"This place is too hot and too wet for me. The soil is poor. There is no school for Becky and Joey. I'm bound for Colorado." And with that, Mr. Baxter said, "Giddy up" to his horses, and the long trip to Colorado began.

Mr. Baxter had settled in east Tennessee after the Civil War. But he was not happy there. One night he was reading a copy of The New York Tribune. He saw the story about Mr. Nathan C. Meeker starting a new town out west. The very next day Mr. Baxter sent in his one hundred fifty-five dollars so that he could be a member of the new town.

In a few weeks he sold his farm. He loaded his covered wagon with bedding, pots and pans, tools, a plow, some seed, and their clothes. With Mrs. Baxter on the front seat of the wagon, and eight year old Becky between them, Mr. Baxter left the "holler in the hills" and headed north. Joey, his son, rode behind the wagon on their saddle horse.

Joey was 10 years old--old enough to be a lot of help to his father. To Joey, this trip was the biggest adventure of his life.

For many days they rode through the thick woods of Tennessee and across Kentucky. At night they camped out. Mother Baxter cooked the meals over an open fire. At last they reached Louisville, Kentucky. It was the biggest city Joey had ever seen. Here Joey and his father said a sad goodbye to Mrs. Baxter and Becky. They would stay with friends in Ohio while Mr. Baxter and Joey went on to Colorado. When a house was built, Mrs. Baxter and Becky would join them.

Joey watched with popping eyes as their wagon and horses were loaded on a big steamboat. Joey could not believe all the new things he was seeing. Never had he seen a steam engine with all its noise and smoke! Never had he seen such a big river as the Ohio!

For many days they steamed down the Ohio River to where it met the Mississippi River. It was even bigger than the Ohio! They now steamed north on the Mississippi until they came to a place called St. Louis. Here they turned west on the Missouri River. After many days they came to a town called Omaha City. Here Mr. Baxter unloaded his wagon and horses. He planned to join a wagon train and cross the prairie to Cheyenne, Wyoming.

From Cheyenne he would go south to Colorado. It was a big surprise to Mr. Baxter when the army soldiers would not let him cross the prairie. Too much Native American trouble! It was not safe for a small wagon train to travel across the prairie at that time.

Just a year before, in 1869, a railroad had been built all the way across the United States. The railroad ran west from Omaha, up the Platte River to Cheyenne, Wyoming. Mr. Baxter rented a box car on the Union Pacific Railroad. He loaded his horses and wagon into one end of the box car. He loaded his household goods into the other end of the car. It cost a little under one hundred dollars for the 650 mile trip.

All day Joey would watch from the open door of the box car. Instead of the tree covered hills of Tennessee, he saw miles and miles of flat land covered with short grass. There were no trees anywhere except along the Platte River.

"Joey, did you know that this is the road people traveled on their way to Oregon?" his father asked. "It was called the Oregon Trail. Then the California gold hunters came this way in 1849. The stagecoach also used this route, and the Pony Express came this way in 1860."

"Why did everyone use this route?" asked Joey. -

"Well," said his father, "this is very dry country. It does not rain much here. The people had to stay close to the river so they could get water. Also, the land along the river is very level. This makes travel easy. And when a wagon tongue broke, or when firewood was needed, these cottonwood trees were the only trees around."

All day and all night, and all day and all night, they rode the train. On the morning of the third day the train pulled into Cheyenne. The Denver Pacific Railroad ran from Cheyenne to Denver. Mr. Baxter planned to change trains here.

"Sure, we can take your wagon and horses to Union Colony," the station master said to Mr. Baxter. "It will cost you fifty dollars."

"What!" sputtered Mr. Baxter. "I paid less than one hundred dollars to come 650 miles. You want to charge me fifty dollars to go 50 miles. I won't pay it. I'll go the last 50 miles by wagon and team!"

So Mr. Baxter and Joey unloaded the wagon and horses from the boxcar. They reloaded the wagon with the plow, seeds, bedding, pots and pans, and some food. It was mid-afternoon by then, but Mr. Baxter wanted to start out anyway. He was in a hurry to get to Union Colony!

They soon left the town of Cheyenne behind. Joey felt that he was on a sea of grass. Everywhere he looked he saw grasslands. There were no trees to be seen. Over it all was the big, wide, blue sky.

Night came before the Baxters could find a place with water and wood to camp. They camped right on the trail and ate a cold meal. Joey had never seen so many big, bright stars. His father told him the howling coyotes would not hurt him, but Joey made his bed close to his dad that night.

Next morning, Joey awoke to the song of meadow larks. His father had made a small fire from sage brush so they had a hot breakfast of coffee and cornmeal mush. They were soon on the trail heading south to Colorado Territory and Union Colony. From the wagon seat Joey could see small herds of buffalo. The big, shaggy beasts looked at the wagon and went on with their eating. White-tailed antelope bounded all over the grass covered plains. There were so many that Joey soon gave up counting.

The trail soon came to Crow Creek. Cottonwood trees lined the bank of the small creek. Mr. Baxter stopped to let the horses rest and get a drink. About noon they made it to Union Colony-almost.

It was the first part of June. The snow melt in the mountains had made the Poudre River so high that it could not be crossed in a wagon.

There was only one bridge that crossed the Poudre, and it was a railroad bridge. What to do? Mr. Baxter solved the problem by swimming his horses across the river. He then got some men to help him pull the wagon across the railroad bridge by hand. Mr. Baxter was one of the few settlers

of Union Colony to arrive by wagon. Most came by railroad. That night Mr. Baxter and Joey camped under a big cottonwood tree in Island Grove Park.

The next morning Mr. Baxter and Joey walked into town to pick out a lot. The town had been started on April 15. Its name had been changed from Union Colony to Greeley. As he watched people run up and down the plowed furrows that marked the streets, Mr. Baxter felt like a fool. Who could build a city in this hot, dry, sandy desert? He went back to camp feeling ashamed for being tricked into following a dreamer.

Next morning, Mr. Baxter and Joey went back into town. There had been a shower of rain during the night. The air smelled fresh. The soil looked better. A few strangers said, "Good Morning." Their spirits began to rise and, the first thing they knew, they were running around looking at lots and wishing they had not wasted so much time.

Next day Mr. Baxter put a tent on his lot and started building his house. One night Mr. Baxter and Joey were sleeping in the tent when they heard a strange noise. Was it someone trying to steal from them? Was it Native Americans? There were a few Native Americans around Greeley, but they

were never any trouble. By the dim light of the moon Mr. Baxter could see who the visitor was--a skunk!

"Keep very still," he said to Joey. "If I shoot it, we will have a stink around here for weeks. Don't do anything to upset the little fellow and maybe he will go away."

Sure enough, when the skunk was satisfied that there was nothing to eat, he trotted out the tent door to look for food and adventure some other place.

On June 10 1870 water was turned into the Number 3 Ditch. Mr. Baxter and Joey took a little time off from work to watch the water come down the ditch. The dry, thirsty soil soaked up the water. The ditch was too small and poorly made. It took more than a week for the water to reach the end of the ditch. There was-not enough water to irrigate the crops that year, and most of the crops burned up in the hot sun.

Mr. Baxter wondered if he should stay, but he went ahead building his house. He hoped to have it ready before winter so that Mrs. Baxter and Becky could join him and Joey. One night a storm hit the town. Wind, hail, and rain ruined the Baxter's tent. They moved into Hotel de Comfort for a few days.

Hotel de Comfort was a building that had been moved from Cheyenne to Greeley. It was located just west of the present depot on the southwest corner of 7th Avenue and 8th Street. It served as a home for many until they could get their own houses built. One large room was used by married people with families.

The other room was used by single men or men like Mr. Baxter who were waiting for their wives to join them. It was a lively place. During the day the people worked on their houses. At night Hotel de Comfort was filled with singing and talking. The people had to entertain themselves. Movies, radio, and television had not yet been invented.

One night the people in Hotel de Comfort awoke with a start! Someone was throwing rocks at the hotel. They looked out and saw a bunch of drunks from Evans who were throwing rocks and lumps of coal at the hotel. The Evans people did not like the Greeley "saints". The men in the hotel grabbed their guns and soon chased the drunks out of town.

Next day Joey asked, "Father, why don't the people in Evans like us? Why do they call us the Greeley saints?"

"Well, it's like this," Mr. Baxter said. "When Mr. Meeker was planning this new town, he did not want any people to join who drank whiskey. That is why no one can buy or sell whiskey in this town. A fellow tried to put up a saloon in Greeley, but somehow it quickly burned down."

On the Fourth of July all work stopped. The pioneers took time out to celebrate the birthday of their country. Hundreds of visitors came by train from Denver and Cheyenne to see how the new settlers in Greeley were doing. A band played, and many speeches were made. Joey heard Mr. Meeker tell how he had dreamed of starting a new community; how he and Mr. Greeley had planned for a city of fine schools, libraries, and churches; how two days before Christmas in 1869, he had met with a group of men interested in the idea, and how in February of 1870, he, Mr. H.T. West, and General Robert A. Cameron came west to pick a spot for the new town.

"We picked this place," he said, "because the soil is fertile! The Poudre River is close enough to provide water for irrigation.

Logs for making lumber can be cut in the mountains west of us and floated down the Poudre to Greeley. We have a railroad that runs right through our town so people can easily travel and receive supplies. We bought most of our land for the settlement from the Denver Pacific Railroad for ninety cents an acre."

After the speeches, Joey got to see cowboys in action for the first time. He could not believe what he saw them do with their lariats. He met one of the cattle men, Mr. Jared Brush, who was to be a life-long friend of the Greeley settlers. The day's celebration ended with fireworks at night. Joey thought it had been some celebration!

One day a letter came from Mrs. Baxter. "Oh, no! Oh, no!" said Mr. Baxter as he read the letter.

"What's the matter, father?" asked Joey. "Bad news?"

"Well, yes and no," said Mr. Baxter. "Your mother's brother has been offered a job in Denver so your mother is coming out with him next week. Oh my! the house is not near ready. What will your mother say when she sees this mess?" - -

Mrs. Baxter did not complain when she arrived. After the warm welcome was over, she looked at the unfinished house, stuck out her chin and went to work. The house had finished walls, a floor, and roof. Doors needed to be hung and windows put in. She set to work cleaning up the plaster inside the house and putting the wood burning kitchen stove in order. There was little wood near, r Greeley, so wood for the cook stove had to be hauled in. Dead cottonwood was hauled in from Crow Creek. Pine was hauled in from the mountains over 20 miles west of Greeley.

Joey and Becky had to start school in July of 1870. One of the reasons Mr. Baxter moved from Tennessee was to be near good schools. There were 35 boys and girls in the school. They were of all ages, and no two of them had the same book. They were taught by Mrs. Virginia Guiney, a widow

from Ohio. She was the first teacher in Greeley. Before the year ended, there were 54 boys and girls in her class.

Becky and Joey could see the town grow each day as they walked from home to school. Mr. Meeker had started his newspaper, The Greeley Tribune, November 16, 1870. In September of 1870 the first church building in Greeley was dedicated by the Baptists. It was located on the southeast corner of 9th Street and 10th Avenue. The Methodists were close behind with a nice brick building on the northwest corner of 10th Avenue and 10th Street. The Presbyterians were also planning to build a church.

In order to get enough water to raise good crops, new irrigation ditches were dug. During the fall of 1870 and the spring of 1871, the 35 mile long Number 2 Ditch was dug. Men, mules, spades, and plows were used. Trucks and tractors had not yet been invented.

Before Greeley was built, and before irrigation water made farms possible, this land was all cattle country. Cattle grazed over miles and miles of open grass land without a fence to stop them. The ranchers did not welcome the Greeley settlers. Everyone knew this country was good only for cattle grazing. Anyone who tried to farm in this desert country must be crazy!

When the Greeley farmers first put in crops they had to hire riders to chase the cattle away from the fields. One rider rode during the day, and one one

rode at night. Still, the cattle got into the fields of corn and wheat. Cattlemen themselves rode through the wheat fields.

In the spring of 1871 the Greeley settlers decided to put a fence around their crops. The fence cost four hundred dollars a mile, and it was over 50 miles long. The cost was so great that the fence was never finished. A few years later barbed wire was invented, and each farmer fenced his own fields.

In the fall of 1872 Greeley got some bad news. Horace Greeley, for whom the town was named, had died on November 29, 1872. The school and Greeley's public buildings were draped in mourning.

In 1873 Joey and Becky went to school in a new building. A big building, with a tower 80 feet high, was built on 10th Avenue between 7th and 8th Street. It was called Meeker School. It was torn down in 1922. The Greeley Community Building stands there today.

As the winter of 1873-74 came on, Mr. Baxter decided that he needed an extra wagon load of coal. He hitched his team to the wagon and headed for a coal mine near Platteville. Dark clouds hung low in the sky, and a brisk wind was blowing out of the east. He ate lunch with the two men who ran the coal mine. They loaded his wagon with coal, and Mr. Baxter headed north to Greeley.

The east wind seemed colder. Soon a few flakes of snow began to fall. Before he was half way home the snow was falling so fast and thick that Mr. Baxter could not see the road. He put his trust in the horses to find the way home. As he was coming up the hill from Evans one of the horses slipped and hurt a leg. It could pull no more. Mr. Baxter got out and helped his one good horse up the hill. He arrived home late at night. His family had been quite worried about him. . .

The snow kept falling. The wind got colder. Snow piled~; up in drifts. Trains were stopped. The ground was covered with snow about three feet deep. Starving cattle broke into stacks of hay the Greeley farmers had put up. Cattle ate the small cottonwood trees that farmers had planted to mark their fields. The people in Greeley were running low on food. One morning they found that hundreds of antelope had gotten inside the colony fence. Over a hundred of the antelope were killed, and the Greeley settlers had fresh meat the rest of the winter.

But the cattle had nothing to eat. Unlike the buffalo, cattle do not know how to paw through the snow to get to the grass. Snow was three feet deep on the level that winter. Cattle died by the thousands from lack of food. Snow covered the ground for 120 days.

The next spring when Mr. Baxter planted his wheat there was plenty of moisture in the soil. But as summer came on and the days got hot, there was not enough irrigation water for the crops. A hail storm wiped out much

of the farmers' wheat. Grasshoppers ate much of the other crops. A farmer's life was not an easy one!

In 1876, the year Colorado became a state, a farmer by the name of Ed Von Gohren had 12 acres of wheat blown out by high winds. It was too late in the year to replant wheat so Mr. Von Gohren planted potatoes. That fall he sold the crop for \$2,200. Other Greeley farmers planted potatoes the next year. By 1883 Greeley farmers raised enough potatoes to fill 300

freight cars. In 1880 the Greeley Elevator was built. It stored and shipped the wheat and potatoes raised around Greeley. Success of the Greeley farmers helped make new businesses.

In the fall of 1879-Greeley got the bad news that Nathan C.Meeker had been killed on September 29, 1879 by the Ute Native Americans.

Yet, as the years went by, Greeley kept growing--Meeker's dream did not die with him. A fine hotel was needed for the many visitors and salesmen coming to Greeley. In 1881 the old Greeley House was torn down and the Oasis Hotel was built. It was on the northeast corner of 8th Avenue and 7th Street. It was rebuilt in 1906 and called the Camfield Hotel. In 1964 the building was torn down. A parking lot is there today (1980).

In the fall of 1885 Greeley put in-an electric light plant. Denver was the first city in Colorado to have electric lights. Greeley was the second. It cost a home owner \$1.25 a month for each lamp.

In 1889 there were 740 students enrolled in the Greeley schools. People felt Greeley needed to have a place to train teachers, so in 1890 a college was started. It was built south of town on a place some called Rattlesnake-Hill. The college is now known as the University of Northern Colorado.

By 1900 banks, warehouses, laundries, hotels, stores, livery stables, creameries, a pickle factory, flour mills, and a post office had been built. Greeley was on its way toward becoming a real city. The pioneer days were over. Meeker's dream had come true where only sand and sage had been. The pioneer days were over!

