

1887: Hulda, family settle in Valley

Hulda Dickinson, Mother's Mother

Home still standing with Verde memories

Editor's note: This is the second in a two-part story about 101-year-old Hulda Smith's pioneer life in the Verde Valley.

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By BENNIE WOOLLEY

And so it was that in September 1887, five-year-old Hulda Susan Smith arrived in Arizona's Verde Valley.

Hard work continued, as the two older Smith boys, Edward and Wyatt, went to work for other farmers to earn enough money to buy lumber to build their own house on a 40-acre farm. Ben Smith recalled that the farm was "Nice farm land, across the Verde River where there were soldiers stationed...My Father had homesteaded and we all built a ditch and got water out of the Verde to irrigate the land."

Around 1893, Hulda Smith's family built the house that stands today, within view of the bridge and library in Camp Verde. Today's structure shows the changes and wear of time and weather — but it still stands.

The Smith family lived there until Maurice Smith Sr. died in 1900. The property was later sold and became part of what is now the old Calloway place.

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While most of the family were homesteading, Hulda was busy growing up. Her first school was in the Middle Verde on the Verde River. Her first day — 95 years ago — was one she will never forget.

It was a long walk and big brothers Wyatt, Ben and Maurice were supposed to take her to school. Specially dressed for the day, ribbon in hair, Hulda fell off the narrow board across a large irrigation ditch.

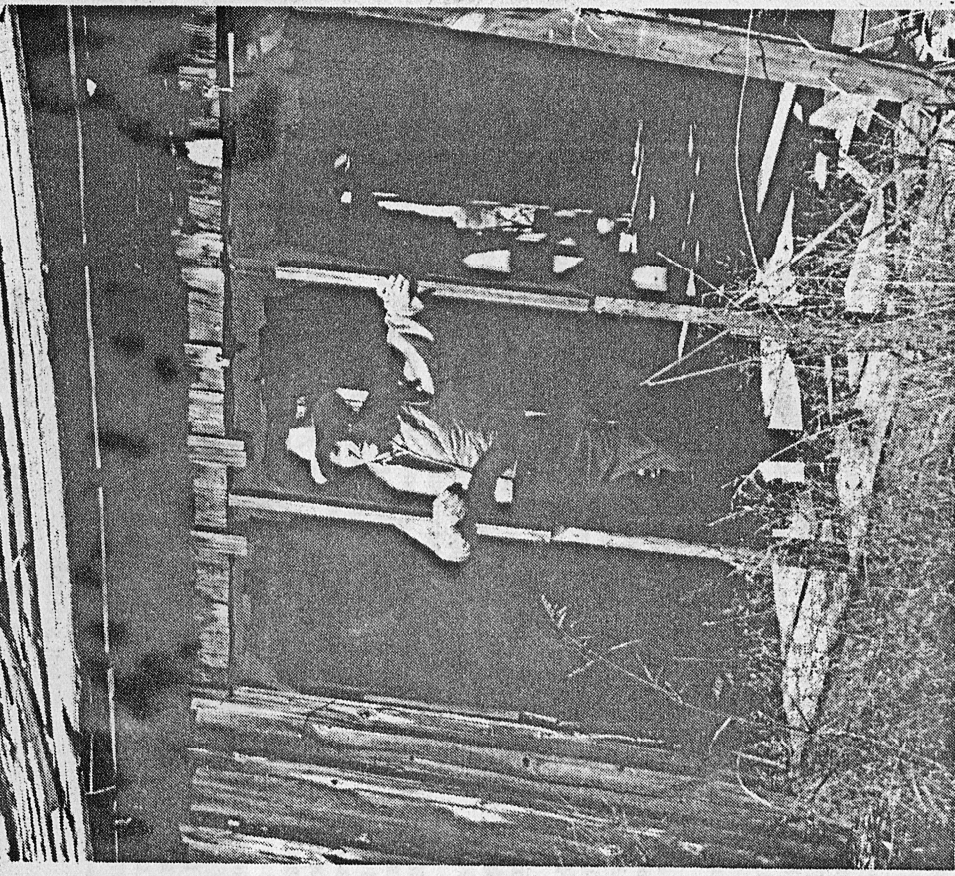
"The water was cold. The boys pulled me out and carried me home. Mother undressed me and put me to bed. I didn't get to school that day."

By age 10, Hulda Smith was a seasoned young traveler to school. "I had to drive a horse and little buggy to take young Aubrey Thompson (sister Sally's boy) and, of course, myself. I had to take care of the horse when we got there. At first I was scared, but he was a nice gentle old horse, Old Bob, so I managed."

Then there were the good times — picnics and dances. Ballrooms could be wherever they were needed. The men would lay down boards for a platform to be used for dancing. Other boards became long picnic tables. Lemonade was served up from a big washtub. Music was by Ben Smith on the violin and Maurice on the guitar.

Always, the best times leave vivid memories.

At 13, Hulda went to Prescott with the Thompson family for a Fourth of July celebration.



Jesse Goddard at old Smith home as is today

bustle. What to do but to order a bustle for Hulda, to be sent to Camp Verde from Prescott?

When Hulda saw the bustle, she emphatically said she would not wear it. It was, she said, "made of wire and looked like a catcher's mask." She agreed, however, to compromise and wore a modified form of bustle made of white muslin.

Mementos of that wedding day are today at the Fort Verde Historic Park in Camp Verde. Photographs of Hulda and Frank Dickinson still hang on the east wall of the Commanding Officer's Quarters. Looking out from the woman's photo, framed by a gold ornate frame of leaf design, is an 18-year-old face, already showing the strength and determination that would take Hulda Smith Dickinson through more than a century of vigorous activity.

Festivities for that Christmas Day, 1899, included a dance in the old adobe owned by Joe Crane — a building once used as the mess hall for the fort. It was across the street and north of the present high school gym in Camp Verde.

At midnight everyone went for a chicken dinner at the boarding house owned by Mrs. Mack Rogers, then a widow. They afterward went back to the dance hall, where they danced until sunup.

'Well, I don't feel that old, maybe about 81.'

—Hulda Smith, 101

Hulda recalled that the girls rode in the covered wagon and the cowboys rode along on their horses. The trip to Prescott took two days over the old Cherry Creek Road

Mayme and Ella Hopper, friends of Hulda, went along. Hulda recalled that the girls rode in the covered wagon and the cowboys rode along on their horses. The trip to Prescott took two days over the old Cherry Creek Road.

"We camped that night near the Midway House, I think it was called. I was told it was a roadhouse, where gambling and rough stuff went on. It was a pretty rough place, I guess. Anyway, a cowboy, Charley Richardson, rode his horse close to me and he handed me his wallet. He asked me to keep it for him, that it had all his wages in it and he didn't want it on him while he was at the road house.

"We girls slept in the wagon. I put Charley's wallet in my little crochet bag and that night I slept with it under my pillow. No one ever knew about it."

Next morning Charley Richardson picked up his wallet and all went on to Prescott for a typical western Fourth of July, with bronc riding, calf roping, wild cow milking and horse races. And, of course, American flags and brightly-colored balloons.

And there were times of great tragedy, which Hulda remembers well. "It was July 2, 1899. Everyone was preparing for the Fourth of July celebration, a community picnic and dance. Frank Dickinson arrived that day from Oak Creek, a guest in our home." Everyone knew he was courting Hulda Susan, who was making a dress to wear on the Fourth.

"Supper was over and all were relaxing, when we saw a rider coming down the lane, riding fast. It was Len Young with tragic

'I put Charley's wallet in my little crochet bag and that night I slept with it under my pillow. No one ever knew about it'

news." Mack Rogers and Clint Wingfield, then-owners of the old Sutler's store in Camp Verde, had been shot. The killer got away. Rogers was dead, and Clint Wingfield was dying.

Harvey Hance left immediately to ride to Prescott to notify Sheriff John Munds. Munds arrived in Camp Verde the following day and formed a posse, which included Frank Dickinson. There was no celebration that year for Camp Verde, and Hulda never finished her dress.

December 1899 brought happy times once again. On Christmas Day Hulda Susan Smith and Frank Dickinson were married. Mrs. Conway Bristow, known to locals as Aunt Molly, made the wedding dress.

According to Aunt Molly, in 1899, a woman was not fashionably dressed unless she wore a

until sunup.

Even after youngsters arrived, the dances went on — kids included and well cared for. Alta Mae, Hulda's daughter, describes a typical evening for young children who accompanied parents to those dances.

They afterward went back to the dance hall, where they danced until sunup

"There was a bed in one end of the hall, curtained off, where the little ones could sleep safely. Jesse Goddard, my brother and I, along with a couple of small Reids, three or four Wingfields and others drifted in dreamland to the beautiful 'Tennessee Waltz' and 'Turkey in the Straw' on old Joe Crane's bed."

Frank Dickinson died in 1925. He was a pioneer rancher in the Verde Valley and Flagstaff area and one of the partners in the old Babbitt Cattle Co. in the early 1900s.

Hulda and Frank Dickinson had five children: Vaudrey Samuel, Alta Mae, Edward Lee, Frank Jr. and Helen May Vaudrey, their first child, was born in the old Fort Verde officers' house. He was born before the time of barbed wire, when he could still ride the open range.

Reflected in Vaudrey was the determination and strength of many of those pioneers. When he was 16 years old, his horse stepped in a prairie dog hole and fell. Vaudrey's back was broken, but he stayed on the job for three more days, then rode 50 miles before getting medical care.

Hulda Dickinson later married Ralph Alexander Marshall, son of one of the early pioneer families in the Verde Valley. They had one child, Mattie Mae. Ralph Marshall died in 1966, and Hulda Marshall lived alone until 1973, when she went to Coolidge to share a home with her daughter, Alta Mae Spooner.

An obvious question to ask Hulda Marshall is, "How does it feel to be 101 years old?" A not-so-obvious answer for a lady more than a century old is, "Well, I don't feel that old, maybe about 81. I am grateful and happy for my good health. And I can do most of the things I like to do. Read the newspapers so I can work on my scrapbooks. I like doing my chores, and taking care of myself."

A family friend over most of his lifetime is Jesse Goddard of Camp Verde. Goddard has spent many an hour "cowboying" with Hulda's son, Vaudrey. And what does Goddard recall about Hulda's recent years? "She makes her own bed. She insists on washing the dishes — and you better not try to help her, either."

Hulda Susan Smith Dickinson Marshall — a big name, a small lady, and an avalanche of memories. Memories that begin somewhere in the stinging dust and sharp jostling from wheels of a covered wagon moving west. Memories that also encompass the feathery contrails of today's jet planes and the soft, plush comfort of the modern overstuffed chair.

But there isn't much chair-time for this lady. On November 2 she celebrated her 101st birthday with friends and family. Beyond that day she will keep her less-than-100 pounds busy and active — making beds, washing dishes, reading her newspapers and, perhaps, reminiscing.

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