

Verde pioneer celebrates 101st



Hulda Smith, 101 and walking

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By BENNIE WOOLLEY

"Most days of my life have been very good." So says Hulda Susan Smith Dickinson Marshall, who, during her 101 years, has known the happiest and saddest of times.

Hulda Susan Smith came west to the Verde Valley in 1887, with her parents and six older brothers and sisters. On Nov. 2, this woman celebrated her 101st birthday — and she will celebrate it on her feet, keeping her usual busy schedule.

Hulda Smith was five years old when her father, Maurice Calvin Smith, put his wife and youngest daughter, along with a few personal possessions, into a covered wagon and began their journey to the Verde. The other six Smith children (William Edward, Sarah Ellen, Julia Sherman, Wyatt Adkins, Benjamin Alexis and Maurice Calvin Jr.) walked beside the wagon.

...From Missouri to the Verde Valley 'All the family walked but Father, Mother and a baby'

Benjamin Smith, Hulda's brother, later wrote about their trip: "We lived near Caplinger's Mill, Cedar County, Missouri, on a rented farm. We were a large family and wages were 75 cents per day." The meager wage was incentive enough, indeed, for a man to leave a home to seek a more favorable economic climate for himself and his family.

Mary Jane Smith, Hulda's Mother (formerly Mary Jane Bristol), had heard from relatives living near Camp Verde about the good wages here. Ben's journal continued: "So my folks talked it over in the fall and decided they would work all winter making ties for the railroad out of oak trees. When spring came, on the 25th of April 1887, we started with two horses and a covered wagon to Arizona."

With their savings of \$15, the nine members of the Smith family began the trip from Missouri to the Verde Valley. And it wasn't easy.

Even the smallest detail had to be

"Pioneer Stories of Arizona's Verde Valley that the family spent "six weeks coming through Kansas. I think the wind blew every day. Some nights the boys had to stake the wagons to keep them from blowing over."

Water, as always with families moving west, was hard to come by. Aunt Sally wrote that the family travelled with "a 16 gallon keg on the side of the wagon. One night we camped at a tank that was a sheep tank. Next morning when the boys were filling the keg, they dipped up a sheep hide, but we had to have water."

Ben A. Smith's account explains how the family financed the trip that began with only \$15. In eastern Colorado they saw "some wild horses feeding off some distance and one nice young horse came to our wagon and walked beside our team, and stayed there until we camped. We tried to run him away, but he would not leave. He was not branded. He stayed with us for over a hundred miles."

"In the evening when we camped near a cow ranch, a man came over to where we were camped, he liked the horse and offered my dad thirty dollars for him. Dad sold it to the man and the money sure helped us out. Mother always said the Lord sent us that horse."

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Near Raton Pass on the Santa Fe Trail the Smith family had another bit of good fortune. In a high mountainous area, two men were camped with a wagon and only one horse. They had been there for 10 days. One of the horses, staked out for the night, had pulled up the stake and gotten away. They offered \$5 to anyone who could find him. "So we three barefoot kids took off through the timber and brush and in about one hour we

timber and brush and in about one hour we brought their horse back. We found him in a box canyon. The five dollars sure helped us buy food."

Near the New Mexico border they ran into an elderly man, Mr. Martin, and a young fellow, also on their way to Arizona. The strangers decided to travel along with the Smiths. Martin soon noticed the strained financial situation of the Smith family.

An unexpected drain on the already flattened pocketbook was the toll bridges. Charge for the Smiths to cross a toll bridge would have been 10 cents apiece so, to beat the problem, all six family members who were walking "would get in our wagon, it was certainly a tight squeeze, and when we got to the bridges, there was a little booth with one man in it. He would come out and collect twenty-five cents from Father. When we got across the river and far enough so they could not see us, we would all get out of the wagon."

Mr. Martin offered help. "He told us he had sold his farm in Kansas and had six thousand dollars in his wagon. He said he

was going to buy a ranch some place in Arizona and that he would loan us enough money to take us to the Verde Valley. So Dad borrowed thirty dollars from him. He did not ask for a note or anything."

With plans to meet Mr. Martin in the fall, Hulda's family then turned south toward the Verde Valley, and after traveling all day, reached "a cow ranch near Hutch Mountain." This was not far from Mormon Lake and the present Mahan Mountain.

"The owner was an old man named Mahan," who told the Smiths that, if they wanted to stay around for a while to "follow a certain road going down a canyon and we would come to a ranch house, or spring house. One that was built over a cold stream of water running out of the side of a hill."

'There was a lot of blood to clean up...But every time it rained ... at the very spot where the man had laid would become dark again'

The house needed some cleaning, Mahan said. It had previously been occupied by a man living alone. Neighbors, just a few days before, had gone over and found the man lying dead on the floor. According to Ben Smith, the man had been shot and "There was a lot of blood to clean up...Mother and the girls got water and scrubbed the floor good. But every time it rained or the weather was damp, the floor at the very spot where the man had laid would become dark again."

Aside from the atmosphere from the recent murder, the cabin was pleasant. It was furnished with bed, cook stove, chairs, pots, pans and dishes.

And, at least for that time, the Smith family had no worries about what they would have for dinner. Ben wrote: "All the cowmen around there said we could live there all summer and for us to round up all

there all summer and for us to round up all the milk cows we could find and they would be ours to use. So Wyatt, Maurice and I went out and rounded up several in our bare feet."

"We had all the milk and butter we could eat and Mr. Mahan told us to look in every cave we could find as Mr. Smell, the man who had been killed, would hide things away from his house. We explored every cave within a mile and found tin cans of beans, coffee, rice, and dried fruit all in tight sealed tin cans. Boy we thought we were in clover."

Food continued to be plentiful. Two cowboys (Tom Picket and Jack of Diamonds), Smith wrote, "would bring us a quarter of beef about every two weeks and a sheep all nice and dressed. We had six cows that gave a lot of milk. Mother and the girls churned and made all the butter we could use."

In the fall, however, because of winter snows, everyone on the mountain had to leave and go to the valley — Smiths included.

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