

The D.C. Brandon.....

ARKANSAS HOMESTEAD STORY



LOG CABIN - FIRST HOME - 1902



NEW HOUSE - SECOND HOME - 1905



SCHOOL HOUSE - BUILT IN 1910

FROM FACTS AND PICTURES FOUND IN FAMILY
RECORDS & STORIES, RECALLED BY ----

Philip L. Brandon

THE D. C. PRANDOL --- ARKANSAS HOMESTEAD

This is the story of the beginning of the David C. Prandon family in 1902, as recalled by the second son, Philip L. Prandon. Information given in this story was taken from family records, letters, pictures, and from stories and tales repeated over the years by various members and friends of the family. It is quite possible that everything reported may not be completely accurate but is as nearly correct as the author could determine from the information available.

(Story written in 1981)

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HOW IT ALL STARTED

In the early nineteen hundreds, land could be acquired in Arkansas through the Homestead Act. In 1901 my father, David Clement Brandon, as a young man, heard about this opportunity and made a trip from Ohio, where he lived, to Arkansas to investigate the possibility of securing some of this "free land."

He explored the land in the area available for homesteading, and selected a section that looked good to him. It was in a mountainous, rough area, located in the Ozark Mountains in Northwest Arkansas. Some of the land between the hills was flat enough, if cleared, it could be developed into farm land. There was also a fine stand of virgin timber that would be available to saw into lumber with which he could construct the buildings he would need.

On the advertised date, Pop was out bright and early to stake the 80 acre section he had chosen. He then went to the Homestead Bureau Land office in Harrison, Arkansas. On their map he identified the area he had staked for his requested homestead. He was the first to request this specific acreage and it was recorded and Pop was given a temporary deed for the 80 acres.

The only requirement to hold the homestead tract of land was that the homesteader must "live on the land and develop it." After a specified number of years, the deed for the land would be cleared and occupancy was no longer required. It could then be sold, if the owner so desired.

The newly acquired property was in Searcy County, which is located in northwest Arkansas, just south of the Buffalo River in an area now called Cozahome. Marshall was the county seat of Searcy County and Harriet and Big Flat were the closest small communities. Their post office was in Harriet. Yellville, to their north and Marshall to their south, each about 20 or 25 miles from the homestead, had railway connections, and some retail stores, banks, and office buildings.

As soon as everything was official, Pop sent a letter to his bride-to-be, Mary Evelyn Vantilburg, who was living in Piqua, Ohio, where she was employed by a doctor whose name was Tidings. Pop told her about his success in getting the homestead land grant and suggested that as soon as he could get a log cabin and barn built, he would return to Ohio for the wedding. They would then return to Arkansas to live and develop the new land as their home.

The story that came down through the years - which varied according to who told it - would indicate that Mom was not as enthusiastic about the new venture as my Pop. In fact several members of Mom's family definitely opposed the idea and were quick to express their feelings.

op continued with his plans however, and cleared an area for the buildings. He also built a sawmill and began to saw the lumber needed. He kept Mom informed of his progress and ignored her objections. She continuously made "a fuss" about "going into that Arkansas wilderness to live."

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POP TAKES A WIFE

When the cabin and barns were finished, and the small fields cleared and planted with grass to be used to feed the animals later --- Pop went back to Ohio. On May 7, 1902, at Piqua, Ohio, in the Methodist Church, my Pop and Mom were married. In a few days, after several parties, and a "belling" given by the young people of the family and neighborhood, they began to assemble and pack the items they would like to take to Arkansas.

A few weeks after the wedding the newly-weds boarded a train in Piqua, Ohio - with their luggage and boxes containing most of their personal belongings - and began their journey to Arkansas. It was to be an experience that would bring about a whole new life style for them. Years later they would look back to this period and recall many of the happy as well as the sad experiences they had during their more than ten years in Arkansas.

Their train went first to St. Louis, Mo., where they changed trains and then went on to Vellville, Arkansas. Vellville was the closest rail point to the area where the homestead farm was located. Marshall, also had a rail connection but was twenty or thirty miles south of the homestead and Pop had determined the trip from Vellville would be easier on Mom.

When they arrived in Vellville, they rented a room at the hotel, and Pop went shopping for a team - either horses or mules - and a wagon. He needed a team and wagon to use on the homestead farm, and if he could purchase them in Vellville, he could also transport their "belongings" and save renting a team and wagon for that purpose.

Fortunately, a young team of horses and a wagon were available and Pop made the purchase. Realizing the condition of the roads would not be good - and to make the trip a little more comfortable for Mom - Pop purchased a spring seat with a back to fit on the wagon. Later Mom said "Pop's idea was better than the springs in the seat."

Arrangements were made to have the wagon loaded and the team ready to leave Vellville at daybreak the next morning. Mom was soon to be introduced to the Ozark Mountains in a way she would never forget. When you realize that Mom had always lived in the flat and rolling hill country of central Ohio, you can see why the Ozarks looked like rugged mountains to her.

MOM'S FIRST IMPRESSION OF ARKANSAS

The roads they traveled on the way to the homestead turned out to be primarily logging roads through the forest. They were full of holes and covered with all sizes of rocks. There were only a few bridges and the streams had to be forded. To make it even more uncomfortable - the trip was plagued with thunder storms. On several occasions the creeks and streams were swift and almost up to the wagon bed, when they had to cross them.

After a long and trying experience, they and all their "earthly belongings" pulled into a clearing and Pop announced proudly, "There she is, Mary." Mom's first view of "the farm" must have given her a mixed emotional experience. She saw the log cabin and barn which was enclosed by a rail fence at the end of a long lane. On either side of the lane were some cleared areas - which were to be used for crops and grazing. The rest of the area she could see was rough and covered with trees of various sizes and kinds.

When the wagon came to a stop in front of the cabin, Pop insisted on picking Mom up and carrying her across the cabin "threshold" - the way every good groom should do with a new bride. Apparently all this was too much for Mom's emotions because I remember hearing Pop tell of this experience in later years and he said "Mary cried like a baby."

When he lowered Mom to the floor inside the cabin, their first deep breath almost choked them. The cabin had been boarded up tightly for more than three months and was damp and musty. The old ashes left in the fireplace gave off an old smoky odor. Mom said many times - as she recalled this experience - that her morale at this point was the lowest it ever got in all her years in Arkansas. She declared that had there been a way - she would have "packed up and gone home to Mother."

The horses, who were named Doll and Topsey, were unhitched, watered, put in the barn and fed. While Pop was doing these chores, Mom started to look more closely at the cabin and its surroundings. She found a homemade broom, that Pop had acquired from a neighbor, and began sweeping the dust, cobwebs, and dirt from the walls and rough board floors. When she came to the fireplace hearth - she let out a blood curdling scream. A large ringneck black snake slithered past her and went out through the open door. This brought Pop on a run from the barn to see what had happened. It took some time to quiet Mom but after Pop had convinced her the snake was gone and "that black snakes are friends of people - they eat bugs and don't bite" - Mom regained control of herself and began to look more objectively at her future.

It was soon after this that they had their first "callers." A neighbor by the name of Holt, who lived about a mile from the homestead - and "had been expecting them most any day now" - had decided to ride over to see if the folks had arrived.

Their arrival was at a most appropriate time and was the beginning of a long friendship. Mom especially appreciated them, even though their life styles were different from that of her friends and family in Ohio. They were very helpful in orienting Mom and Dad in the ways of mountain "folk."

Other families living in the area were: the Hayes, Harrolls, Sidells, Stanleys, Blankenships, Tayberrys, Brocketts and Joles. During the years these people became their neighbors and friends and were often mentioned when recalling things that happened "in Arkansas."

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THE LOG CABIN - AND A NEW LIFE STYLE

The cabin was 15 feet wide and 24 feet long, with a living area 15 feet by 10 feet. The bedroom was 10 feet by 14 feet. There was a small closet in the corner of the bedroom. A small alcove area, with open shelves, opened off the living area. This was to serve as the kitchen. A small one-hole flat wood burning stove - with a pipe extended out through the window - along with the fireplace - served as the heating and cooking facilities. The fireplace was made with large stones gathered within "carrying distance" of the cabin.

There was only one door-way into the cabin. It was located at the front, under a long over-hanging porch-type roof which extended the entire length of the cabin. The supporting posts for this overhanging roof were set on flat stones and the floor was dirt. There were small windows in each end of the living area and two windows in the bedroom. Fortunately this gave some cross ventilation which was needed during the hot summers.

Before Dad had returned to Ohio to get Mom, he had made a rope bed, with a corn shuck mattress on which he slept while "getting things built." Since they did not bring a bed from Ohio - this was the only sleeping facilities they had until a real bed could be built and a real mattress was purchased. The tales told about trying to sleep on this bed were repeated many times for years. The jokes and wisecracks depended on who told the story and where it was being told. You can be sure a new bed and mattress were on the top of Mom's list.

FARMING AND GARDENING AMONG THE STONES

The ability to exist on this farm depended on how quickly they could get the new land ready and vegetables and crops planted. Even though the neighbors shared their gardens - it was important that they get their own garden and fields planted and begin to raise food for themselves and their animals as soon as possible. Since Spring was on them and the few things Pop had planted earlier were limited, it was a number one priority to get the new land ready and vegetables and crops in the ground. Other things had to wait - and Pop with Boll and Topsy plowed the stoney ground and Mom began to make her first garden. Pop also worked to get the cleared fields ready to plant corn and grain.

During these first few weeks they learned to appreciate their new neighbors who not only shared their garden crops - but also advised them about what would grow best on their Arkansas farm. It was then they learned about blackeyed peas. In later years they introduced them to their Ohio friends as "blackeyed beans."

The problem of farming mountain land is the same everywhere - "What to do with the stones? -- Do you try to remove them or farm around them?" It is understandable why Mom declared -- "this is the poorest excuse for soil I've ever seen." She often said the only enjoyment she received from working in her Arkansas garden was watching the beautiful sunsets as she worked in the evenings and then taking a cool drink of water from the spring at the back of the garden when she had finished.

After the first shock of getting adjusted to the new life style, things seemed to improve. The sawmill Pop had built when he first went to claim the homestead, was patronized by many of the neighbors who brought their trees to be sawed into lumber. Pop also sold some lumber he sawed from trees on his own farm. This provided cash with which they could purchase the many items they needed for their house and farm. Their Montgomery Ward Catalogue was an important publication to them.

MOM'S TRAINING PAYS OFF

Mom's training and experience she had received while working as a practical nurse and housekeeper for Dr. Tidings in Tiqua, Ohio now became very useful in this new setting. The neighbors soon began to come to her for help and advice when any of their family became sick or hurt. Dr. Adams, the nearest Doctor, also learned of Mom's skills and experience and called on her to assist him when he was attending some one in the neighborhood. It was through this contact that Mom became acquainted with the "Adams girls", who were Doctor Adams daughters and more like the friends she had left in Ohio.

The first years were learning years for both Mom and Pop. They learned to make many things they needed - such as charcoal, furniture, clothing and how to prepare some foods they had not been accustomed to eating in Ohio. They learned about grits, sowbelly pork and cornbread, to name a few.

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RALPH AARON IS BORN

About two years after Mom and Pop "took over" the Arkansas homestead - on July 26, 1904 - with Doc Adams' assistance - Ralph Aaron was born. Like most "first babies" he became the big news and attraction for not only "the folks" but for the relatives back in Ohio. They sent many gifts and letters congratulating them and wishing them well. Among the gifts was a Kodak camera complete with developing and printing equipment. With this camera and Mom's ability to learn "how-to-do-it" from the instruction book - they were soon taking pictures, developing and printing them and sending copies back to family and friends in Ohio. Some of these pictures - although not up to today's standards - are still to be found among the old files of many of the family. A very unusual set of these pictures are the ones Mom made and mounted to be viewed through a viewer that gives a three dimensional effect.

Ralph received many gifts. Some of the items he was given were viewed by the neighbor children as "wonderful" since they had not seen many "store toys." A store-purchased red wagon and a jack-in-the-box were two they especially liked.

Ralph also had several pets - including a goat, a pet pig and a large cat. Apparently Mom enjoyed taking pictures of him playing with his animals - because several such prints are still among the family picture collection.

Flora Holt, a neighbor girl, often came to play with Ralph and especially enjoyed playing "house" with him. Apparently so she could play with a doll belonging to Mom. Ralph was younger than Flora and was not permitted to play with the doll only on special occasions. Flora must have been "a special occasion" because the pictures in the family

collection show Flora holding the doll and Ralph looking on. Mom had written on the back of the picture - "Ralph says, 'I want it'."

By the time Ralph was born, Mom had learned to ride a horse side-saddle. She would saddle up Doll and with Ralph on one arm and the reins in the other - she would go to neighbors, or to the post office in Harriet or to Big Flat and not only brought things back for themselves but also items for the neighbors. This involved handling the horse while holding Ralph and making sure the letters and packages were secure. Since this was the only contact they had with their family and friends back in Ohio - it apparently was a task Mom enjoyed.

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VISITORS BEGIN TO ARRIVE

Soon after the folks were settled, some of the family began making plans to come to Arkansas for a visit. The available records do not show all who came - but some of those mentioned or appear in old snapshots were - Uncle Ray and Aunt Mary Vantilburg, Uncle John and Aunt Florence Speelman, Uncle Weer Vantilburg, Uncle Tom Brandon, and Aunt Sadie Brandon Christian and her friend Eva. (Eva's last name was not mentioned in Aunt Sadie's diary or in any other of the historical data.) Uncle Weer, then a young man 19 years old - came for an "extended work visit" and stayed two years. I'm sure he not only was a great help to the folks but if the tales I heard over the years had any validity - he also provided considerable excitement and many anxious moments for the folks.

Everyone who came for a visit, apparently also helped with the work to be done on the homestead. Along with their sightseeing, deer hunting, fishing, picnicing and cave exploring they also cut wood, helped make charcoal and many other jobs the folks needed help in doing.

One tale I remember hearing Uncle Ray tell when I was a teen-ager attending the Vantilburg Family Reunion - had to do with a deer hunt they were on while he and Aunt Mary were visiting the folks. The story goes that Pop had arranged the hunt and very graciously gave Uncle Ray a deer rifle to use that was noted for the recoil jolt it gave the person firing it. Pop was not aware that someone had "tipped off" Uncle Ray about this rifle and that he knew he was being "set up" to be the "butt of the joke."

According to Uncle Ray's version - he told Pop he wouldn't think of using his favorite deer rifle - and would be very well satisfied with one of the other guns. He said he told Pop this was the first time he had ever gone deer hunting anyway - and probably wouldn't recognize a buck deer if one came his way. Finally, not knowing any way out, Pop

agreed to use the "kicking" rifle but chose a position on a stump that he was sure was well out of the path any deer would take. He would not have any reason to fire the rifle.

According to Uncle Ray's version of the story - Pop also made considerable noise after he had taken his position - obviously making sure any deer hearing the noise would turn and run the other way. Much to everyones surprise - reports Uncle Ray - a large buck came crashing out of the woods into the clearing just a few yards from the stump where Pop was standing. Without thinking - Pop aimed and fired. When he "came to" according to Uncle Ray - Pop was flat on his back at the bottom of the stump - wondering what had hit him.

Apparently, Pop's aim was good. I remember as a boy seeing the horns of a buck deer hanging in our Ohio home that was supposedly from the only deer Pop ever shot.

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NEW HOUSE PLANNED

No sooner had the folks settled into their log cabin than Mom began to campaign for a new house. They drew floor plans, and Pop began to cut trees and saw lumber getting ready for construction. Shortly after Ralph was born, they began to build the new house.

The house and buildings were located in the middle of the cleared forty acre area. This area was divided by rail fences into fields of various size. One area was an orchard with apples and peaches; there was a field where corn or grain was grown; another field was used for pasture and near the house was a large garden plot. The rest of the farm was in timber and was too rough and rocky to be used for farming. In this area were several caves that became sightseeing and picnic areas for the people who visited the folks.

When the new six room house was finished it was the show place of the neighborhood. There was a white picket fence around the yard and a long roofed porch extending around two sides of the house. Mom had curtained the windows and crocheted throw rugs to cover the polished white pine floors. She also decorated the walls with pictures and crafts she had been given or made herself. All this gave the new house a look of elegance not usually found in the average Ozark Mountain home in those days.

Pop made by hand much of the furniture they used in their new home; including tables, bookcases, chest of drawers, writing desk and the head boards for the beds. He used some very large white pine trees from which he sawed the boards to construct the furniture. Many of these boards measured over twenty inches wide, after they were sawed and finished. Some of this furniture is still in the family, and one wonders how Pop was able to construct such furniture with the limited tools he had available.

MORE VISITORS

Among the family visitors who came to see the folks shortly after they moved into their new house was Uncle John and Aunt Florence Speelman, Mom's sister and brother-in-law. Some of the pictures in the family album would suggest that their visit coincided with that of Uncle Ray and Aunt Mary Vantilburg. It was quite possible that Uncle Weer was also living with the folks at that time - since he was there from 1908 to 1910.

Another family visitor was Pop's youngest sister, Sadie Brandon-Christian and her girl friend, Eva. At the time of their visit both young ladies were unmarried and worked at the "Over-all" Manufacturing Company in Versailles, Ohio.

With all these visitors to entertain - the new six room house was none too large. The log cabin may have also still been usable and it took the over-flow. I was unable to find any references in the family records about the cabin after the new house was built. It is indicated however that Ralph, their first son, was born in the log cabin and I, the second son, was born in the new house.

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AUNT SADIE'S DIARY

Aunt Sadie kept a diary of her visit to Arkansas. Fortunately, the original hand written account of the first part of her visit, with a day by day (sometimes hour by hour) story was found among Mom's family historical collection.

The following is a photo copy of her unedited, handwritten account of the visit which took place in July 1907. It gives impressions and feelings they had about the country and life style of the people they met.

Aunt Sadie wrote with a beautiful penmanship - but her spelling and choice of words gives one a true feeling of what she was experiencing. They were two maiden ladies - who did not marry until they were well past 30 years of age - on a trip - a long way from home for them - experiencing what seemed to be a whole new life style that they had never encountered in Ohio.

July 16-1907.

Trip to Arkansas and back.

Left Versailles July 16-1907 at
7:47 A.M. arrived at Marshall
Ark. July 17- 2:20 P.M.

Everything looked bad to us.
Our grips did not come and ^{no} body
too meet us. So we sit down
in the depot a while and then
decided to find a place where
we could stay all night.

After ask at the agent where would
be a good place to stay he told
us a place near the depot and a
couple other places. They took our
small grip and started. The first
place they would not keep us.
They went on to the next place.

we didn't think we wanted to stay there so we inquired on to the next place when we arrived there we found a good hearted widow woman and she took us in. and showed us our room. we spent the rest of the afternoon writing back home we went up in the we mailed our letters. and took a walk over town. we found the town quite different than the town in our country they had no sidewalks and no regulations to the town and not much in it. compared with the county seats in our country. After viewing the town we went back and retired for the

night. and rested pretty good untill -3-
about 1 o'clock A.M. when Eva awoke
and heard a noise in the room above
us and as our room was a poor
thing nothing to keep burglars out,
we began to get afraid Eva got
so afraid she got up and wrote a
letter I was a little afraid too but
I was so tired and sleepy I couldn't
stay awake. but nothing carried us
off. When morning came we began
to look for Clement and looked till
noon and No Clement come so we
began to look for some one to take
us out. The distant being 18 mile.
We inquired around untill we
found a man that new Clem
and he assisted us in getting a
way he was clerk in the bank.
there was a man happened to
come in that lived 6 miles of

"Clemente. he said we could ride out with he and his wife if we would ride in a big wagon of course we was glad of the chance. they had two spring seats. we waited till the train come to see if our gips come and it did so we was ready to start it was then 2:05 PM. The road was awful rough and our spring seat broke down before we was two mile from Marshall. The old fellow got out and tried to fix it but he didnt fix it so it would spring any and we went on every thing was new to us and we enjoyed it fine for a while. We could reach out of the wagon and pick black berries. when we was about 4 mile from Marshall we both began to get so tired in our body we began to think we never could stand it but we still stayed in and went.

on a few miles farther and it began to thunder and lightning as we got up and began to prepare for rain. I took no advantage out of the telescope and put our hats on. By that time it began to rain and I guess it did rain we got wet through our coats. The hide just soaked. We had our umbrellas we found it to the lady that was along she didn't have even a wrap. We thought it was funny when it was raining and the water run off our nose almost in a stream but when it quit raining we were almost as wet as the people lived with we were with I say said we could stay all night with them but we thought we would rather go on to Clements and the man said he would take us on if we wanted to go. Over road about 8 miles

After we got wet the sun began to
~~go~~ down and we began to get
chilly and it began to get dark
(imagine 15 miles in the woods and
know no body) but we went on.
and got to Clements about 8 o'clock
and glad we were there, but felt
like we had come to a poor place to
stay all night. They had had an
accident at the Saw mill a man
got his arm broke in three places
and bruised badly and that being
the closest place they took him
there, and there house was so small
only three little rooms, but we
got along all right we rested one
day, the next day being Saturday.
Clement took us to Holts Spring
and to a large hole in the ground.
it was about 10 ft across the top
and 20 ft deep the bottom was

perfectly dry. we went down the bluff and crawled back to this opening where we could stand up straight. we walked back a few feet farther and there was an opening similar to the first only it was not all the way through. In the center of this opening a large rock resembling the clapper of a bell seemed to be hanging. It was pretty to see. This is all we visited that day. but went home with a load of chiggers and seed ticks. which was something very uncomfortable to have. Sunday we all went out for a stroll and took our dinner along. we started at about 10-30 A.M. and drilled in about 5-30 P.M. walked the entire round. The first place of interest was the "rock house" It was not a real house but a semi-circular wall of rock having a rock ceiling and floor.

It resembles very much the galleries of a theatre. Eva & I crawled up on a landing about 8 feet from the bottom and Mary took our pictures. We then went on to a small cave which was very pretty. We were in five different caves that day. Three of which were of minor importance. The first of great interest is the blowing spring of the best water one ever drank. We went into the cave a few feet back and it was like going out of doors in Ohio on a zero morning. Ralph got so cold Mary had to take him out in the sunshine. He wanted to know why they didn't bring his mittens. The water was as clear as crystal making the depth very deceiving. The water where we were looked to us to be very shallow but where

it was measured it proved to be three⁻⁹⁻ ft. deep or more, the water extended farther

back than we could see the only way to explore this cave would be by using a canoe and drift back in it

We certainly enjoyed this place and water. We then went down a little

ways from the cave and sit down upon the root of a sycamore tree from

this root 4 trees have grown. We eat our lunch there. Then Clem took

our pictures, The next interesting place

was a cave also. the mouth of this

cave looks like the mouth of a cat fish. Clem went down first and

he set his foot upon a rock then

Eva slid down upon his knee. there

on down to first landing which

was about 8 ft. down. I went

next then Mary and Ralph. the

We started again. Element walked.
We started about 10-30 A.M. took
a lunch and was gone the next
the entire day. The first place we
visited that day was a small
apartment we took a drink and walked
our house. near by was a cabin
and told on it but knew today
living in it we ate our lunch
there. Then took another drink and
started on till we came to the
school house they were having
school as we stopped a while to
visit the school the teacher was
as doubtful ~~about~~ ~~with~~ ~~the~~ ~~teacher~~
~~as doubtful about with the teacher~~
visiting a class. The school house
was a lovely place. The windows
lights were all knocked out. a
regular old fashion school like

our fathers and grand fathers use⁻¹³⁻
to go to. After leaving the school house
we went on to a cave that was
called the bango cave it was the
prettys sight of all of the caves,

Sadie Brandon

UNCLE WEER VANTILBURG
"A Two Year Visit"

As a young man, Uncle Weer Vantilburg, came from Ohio to visit the folks and stayed for two years. He came in the Spring of 1908 and left in the fall of 1910. Many of the tales told about his daredevil activities include his interest in exploring the many caves in the area.

The following story is about a cave that had never been explored - and Weer felt "it should be looked into."

The tale is told, as I recall hearing it, when told to me as a boy. I have taken some editorial privileges to fill in where facts are somewhat hazy in my memory.

"CAVES ARE TO BE EXPLORED" - according to Weer.

Like many young men, Uncle Weer was adventurous and enjoyed taking risks - much to the disapproval of his older sister, my Mom. She especially was concerned when he wanted to explore a cave on the homestead that had never been explored before. According to the natives, the cave was considered very dangerous because the opening was very small and from what they could see when they looked in, there was a bottomless four or five foot wide crevice just inside the entrance.

Knowing this - this cave became Uncle Weer's ultimate challenge. He wanted to go inside and determine what the cavern looked like and how far it extended into the mountain. Finally - providing certain precautions be observed - Pop agreed to permit Weer to enter the cave and "look around."

Previous would-be explorers - who were small enough to squeeze through the opening - had reported that there was a narrow ledge just inside the entrance to the cave which led to what appeared to be a large cavern room-type area on beyond. None of the earlier explorers wanted to chance sliding along the narrow ledge to get to a point where they could really see the cavern - because they were fearful of falling into the so-called bottomless crevice.

With this information about what to expect when he got inside, plans for Weer's adventure were made. It was agreed that a rope would be secured around his waist and the men on the outside would hold the end of the rope - keeping it taut enough to prevent Weer from falling very far if he should slip from the ledge. They also could determine how far he had gone by the amount of rope that had been released. The rope could also be used as a way to signal by pre-determined jerks.

Weer took with him a kerosene lantern, a canteen of water, two candles, and some matches placed in a water-tight snuff box.

After reviewing the plans and signals - they agreed that regardless of what he found he should not stay in the cave more than about an hour and one half. "There can always be another day" he was reminded.

With everything agreed - Weer slipped through the narrow cave opening and once inside stood up and called back "Everything is fine - see you in a little while". Nothing more was heard from him for over an hour but every few minutes some more rope was pulled into the cave, indicating that Weer was moving further away from the opening. Then there were several minutes when no more rope was pulled in. They assumed that Weer must be starting back towards the opening and so they began gently to pull the rope out of the cave. They became concerned when they realized that the rope did not seem to be fastened to anything. They reasoned that if Weer had fallen into the crevice and the rope was still tied around his waist - it would surely become tight. They also realized that if for some reason he had removed the rope from his waist, they might pull it out of his reach and he not only would be in danger of falling but would not have any way of signaling them.

Not knowing what to do, they continued to slowly pull a little more of the rope out through the hole and suddenly the end of the rope appeared. They called through the opening of the cave but did not get a response from Weer.

None of the men were small enough to squeeze through the narrow opening to try and see what had happened, and it would take some time to locate someone else who would be willing to "go in." They considered "blasting" - but realized they might seal the opening rather than open it. It was about sundown and the men outside the cave began to panic trying to decide what to do.

Just then they heard a man's call - but it wasn't coming from the cave. When they heard a second call they realized that it was coming from the top of the mountain above the cave opening. It was Weer. In a few minutes he had worked his way down the slope through the bushes and stones to where the men were anxiously waiting to hear his story.

He had found the ledge in the cave the previous explorers had described, and had decided to crawl on the ledge around the corner, where the bottomless crevice seemed narrow enough that he could jump to the cavern floor below. He untied the rope from his waist so that it would eliminate the possibility of it catching on a rock and causing him to fall into the crevice. He gently pulled some extra rope into the cave and tossed the loose end over the crevice to the floor of the cavern below. Then with his lantern in his hand he jumped. Everything went as planned except as he landed on the floor of the cavern, the lantern slipped from his hand and rolled into the crevice and the light went out.

Carefully he took a candle from his pocket and held it under his arm until he could get a match from the snuff box. After he had lighted the candle he discovered he had landed on the floor of a very large cavern type room.

He could not see all of the room with the candle light and so he started to edge his way along the wall opposite the crevice. The wall had several alcoves and as he went around a corner he saw light coming from some place at the end of one of them. He carefully worked his way toward the light and discovered it was coming from a small tunnel about four feet up on the end wall of the cavern. He climbed up into the tunnel and began to crawl on his stomach toward the light. After several minutes of crawling and squeezing through tight places - he finally came out on the side of the mountain.

When he became oriented as to his location, he decided he was on the opposite side of the mountain from where he entered the cave. He then climbed to the top of the mountain and when he saw the men waiting below he called to them, ending an experience all were glad to have end.

Pop's first comment was - "Weer - as far as I'm concerned - you don't ever need to find out what is inside any more caves - I don't want to know."

Post Script: Weer did explore other caves - and some became popular places for others to visit - but none were ever as exciting as this one.

RALPH NEARS SCHOOL AGE

As Ralph neared school age, the folks became concerned that there wasn't a school in the area. The only learning opportunities the children had were offered by parents and neighbors in someone's home. Occasionally a visiting teacher would spend a week or so in the community, helping augment the family teaching programs.

Dop and Mom invited some of their neighbors to come to their place to discuss the possibility of constructing a school house and employing a teacher to conduct classes at least four or five months each year. They offered to help by sawing the lumber for the school house - and even offered to donate some land on the corner of their farm where the building could be built.

When the vote was taken, enough agreed for them to move ahead with the project. One of Dr. Adams' daughters was employed to teach. The one room school building was built and ready for "school" to begin in the fall of 1909*. Ralph was one of fourteen children enrolled in the school when the new building opened. Ralph, as a first grader, is pictured along with the other children and teacher in a snapshot found in an old family album.

* - Aunt Sadie Brandon's account in her diary telling of her visit in July 1907 to a school building is somewhat confusing unless the school was in operation for two years before Ralph started to school.

THE BABY WHO COULDN'T WAIT FOR THE DOCTOR!

On August 31, 1910 all indications were that it was "about time" for the second new baby to make an appearance into the Clem and Mary Brandon's family.

This was nothing unusual - because thousands of new babies came into the world every day. However, this was in the Ozark Mountains in Searcy County, just a few miles east of the Buffalo river, in northwest Arkansas, on a homestead staked out some eight years before and they were now "expecting" their second child.

The closest mid-wife, who had helped with the birth of their first son Ralph, - lived about "one horse-back hour" away. The doctor however, was a day's ride, or more, away from the Brandon homestead.

It was agreed that "Clem" would go for the mid-wife and bring her to the house to "get things ready." Weer Ventilburg, Mom's brother, was assigned the job to go after the doctor who lived in Marshall, some 25 miles away.

Weer planned on taking a day to ride to Marshall and by leaving early the next morning with the doctor, be back to the homestead by early afternoon. However, his plans did not work out. His route made it necessary for him to ford a couple of streams that emptied into the Buffalo River, which even today is known for it's rapid rising when there are heavy rains upstream. A few hours before Weer arrived at a place he planned to ford one of the streams, a heavy thunderstorm had occurred up stream on the Buffalo River. The water had backed up so high in the stream he had to cross, and was so swift, he was afraid to try to swim his horse across under these conditions.

He made camp on the bank and waited. The water went down in a few hours and he was able to continue his trip to Marshall. However, he was almost a day behind schedule when he started back with Doc Adams.

When they finally arrived at the Brandon home stead, it was late on September 2nd and the baby - Philip Leroy Brandon- had made his arrival early September 1st.

(Moral - If you want to be on time - plan to start a little early.)

BACK TO OHIO

With a new baby, and a six year old, the future became a little more involved for the folks. They became concerned with the training and education of their boys and it did not appear that they could expect much immediate advancement in this rural Ozark mountain area.

In 1912 they suddenly decided to return to Ohio. The old Brandon home in Patterson Township in Darke County near Yorkshire, Ohio was available for them to rent and farm. Grandpa Robert Brandon - Pop's father - had decided to give up farming and had moved to Versailles, Ohio.

Soon after Mom and Pop decided to move, they sold their live stock, and all their belongings they did not wish to move back to Ohio. In the early spring of 1912 they were back in Ohio ready to start the second phase of their married life on the farm where Pop had grown up as a boy.

The school problem they had in Arkansas, was solved in Ohio. The Straker one room school was already considered one of the best - and was located on the corner of the Brandon farm making it possible for Ralph to walk from his home to the school house in just a few minutes.

Educating their boys, was always an important consideration in the planning done by Mom and Pop. It paid off because all three* of their sons completed college and went on to do advanced graduate work in their various chosen fields of service.

The Arkansas homestead farm was not sold for sometime after Pop and Mom moved back to Ohio. There was some concern about what would happen to the buildings and farm land without anyone living on it, even though a neighbor had agreed to "look after things." The reports about the farm were very few and finally stopped coming at all.

About four years after the folks left Arkansas, they received a letter from a man who reported that a forest fire had burned the buildings and most of the timber on the farm. Since they did not have insurance they decided it would have to be written off as a total loss. Under these conditions they did not expect a very good price should they find a buyer.

Some weeks later the same person wrote them another letter and suggested that he would give them a \$1,000.00 for the farm - which he felt was a very liberal offer considering everything. After some exchange of letters, they settled on a figure of \$1,300.00 - and the Arkansas experience came to an end.

*Edwin Brandon, their third son, was born on the farm in Patterson Township.

All seemed well until the United States became involved in World War One. It was then they learned that zinc had been discovered in the area near the old homestead. The government needed zinc for making munitions and was willing to furnish funds for developing zinc deposit mines as well as pay a good price for ore mined and delivered. I'm not sure zinc was ever mined on the Brandon homestead. However, in the March 1977 issue of the National Geographic magazine there is a story about the Buffalo river in which reference is made about a zinc formation near Rush Creek with a map showing an old zinc mine ghost town near where the old Brandon homestead had been located.

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RALPH AND FAMILY VISIT THE OLD HOMESTEAD

In 1941 Ralph Brandon, then pastor of the Covington, Ohio Christian Church, and his family visited the area where the homestead farm had been located. They found some old buildings still standing on the farm which may have been the ones Pop and Mom built. If they were the same buildings, apparently not "everything was destroyed by a forest fire" as had been indicated by the man who purchased the farm.

The pictures taken by Ralph of these buildings appear very much like the buildings in pictures made by Mom some 35 years earlier.

The following are excerpts from a letter sent to Mom and Pop by Ralph while he and his family were on a trip to Arkansas in 1941. It may be the last letter he wrote to them since his untimely death came shortly after they returned to Ohio.

- o - o -

Big Flat, Arkansas
Tuesday Morning June 24, 1941

Dear Folks:

----- In the afternoon we left our things at the cottage and took a 70 mile drive south and west of Harrison. We saw some beautiful scenery. While crossing the mountains on a road that hadn't been all rebuilt, we came to one section where we edged around the mountain on a road just wide enough for the car. David said, "Is this the United States of America?" When we first entered Arkansas he looked around and said, "This looks to me like plain old Ohio - - - - -."

Monday morning we packed up and came to Big Flat. On the way, we came through Yellville and by the Buffalo River State Park. This park is located in what the Adams say you will know as the De Soto country. It is just across the Buffalo River from your place, just in Marion County - - - - -.

We traveled on down the state road to a school house, and went into a place to inquire and found an old lady who's name was Mattie. She didn't remember you but the school was Rock Creek School, a frame building which had replaced the old log one.

We turned left here and went N. East to Cozashome. Cozashome is the name today, of the place where you lived. There is a store across from the school and 3 or 4 houses. None of the schools are used now - all children go by bus to Marshall to school. The name Pleasant Ridge seems to have completely disappeared. The school building is used as a Pentecostal Church now. As far as I have been able to find out - the Hayes family that moved on the Carroll place is the only family in the community that was there when you lived there. The Stanley's place is gone and so are many others. I'm going back tomorrow to see Mr. Hayes and learn more about things.

The road you traveled from the school down to the house is all grown over. We drove to the Hudson Place (where the Poles used to live) and walked down the hill to the Brandon homestead. Part - if not all - of this road is the one you built. Just one building which you built is still standing. The old log smoke house is there - an extra room has been built on in front, about twice the size of the extended roof you had in front. Another shed has been built 4 or 5 feet north of this.

We went down to the old spring. There are a few stones there and a little pool of water - but it was so nearly dried up that there was no water running out at all. Anna Adams says there is a new spring up the valley just south of where you built the road.

Today the Adams are taking us to see the caves in the vicinity - they have packed a picnic lunch. May is home with Anna and their mother. None of them seem as old as they really are - - -.

Anna pointed out how you used to travel to Big Flat. I think the biggest change you would notice here is the roads. Next would be that all the white pine timber and much of the hardwood of any size is cut out. Old roads are gone and auto roads are built many times in new places.

Anna got lost looking for the cave - took two hours -. We went from the cave to Avey's Spring for our picnic dinner.

Marion is going to wash today while the boys and I go back to the homestead to look around some more. By cutting down a couple of small trees across the road, I can drive down to where the house stood.

----- We will write more after I have given the place a more thorough examination.

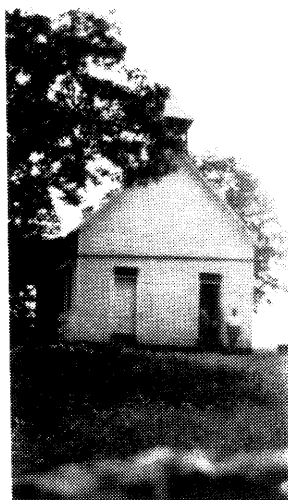
Love, Ralph

Postscript: It is appropriate that this Brandon Homestead
Story end with Ralph's updating account -----
even though it was written forty years ago --
(June 1941)



THE BRANDON ARKANSAS HOMESTEAD

1941



THE SCHOOL HOUSE POP BUILT

64 Salisbury Road
Delmar, NY 12054
August 28, 1987

Dear Scott:

Sorry you and your f@lks weren't able to make the Brandon family reunion. If you count the days people came early and stayed late it ran about seven days! There were about two dozen relatives and friends all together.

Enclosed is a story written by your Greatuncle Phil about your Greatgrandparents Brandon's homesteading adventure in Arkansas where you Grandfather Brandon was born in a log cabin. Your Greataunt Eva wanted you to have a copy.

Hope all is going well for you and that you are getting settled in your apartment. The very best of wishes from all of those at the reunion.

Uncle Harold