

# MONTANA EPISODES

## Homestead Fun



The two young women are the daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Bert Collings, who homesteaded north of Harlowton. Others are, left to right: Boone Trimmer, Mrs. Collings, Jim Trimmer, Bert Collings, Lawrence Dixon (kneeling).



Left to right: Collings daughter, Boone Trimmer, Lawrence Dixon, Bert Collings, Jim Trimmer, Collings daughter, unidentified man.

It takes very little imagination to conjure up the fun this group must have had some Sunday afternoons.

The half-sod shack, like the Collings' here, was not very common in this area but was a great idea. The winds that raked across the hills and prairies were difficult for the easterners to become accustomed to. Our mother kept a calendar record of the days the wind blew without let-up one winter. It came to something like 64.

by Ruth E. Cameron

The homesteaders were adventurous, gambling on crops, looking for something new, leaving something old or just plain hopeful. They were new people in a new land, although many of them came in groups from the same homeland: Ohio, Minnesota or overseas.

No matter where they came from they liked a good time after the harvest was in or on the 4th of July or just about any Sunday afternoon the year round.

They had to depend on each other for entertainment. There were dances and picnics. They went fishing and hunting, berry picking, looking for mushrooms. They took Sunday drives and nobody was surprised when the Model T had to have a tire changed. They collected from miles around for a threshing day. They laughed and visited and played pranks on each other, or acted just plain silly. Probably this was a way of putting aside worries about crops and weather, and the inevitable homesickness.

But they did have a lot of fun and ended up with

some delightful memories whether or not they managed to stay in Montana.

My uncles, Walter, Boone and James Trimmer homesteaded north of Harlowton in central Montana in 1910. Their homestead joined that of Lawrence Dixon, an Oregon schoolteacher who came to Montana to teach at Barber and take up a homestead. The Trimmers' sister, Campsy Belle, came west to cook for them in 1912. Her father bought up a relinquishment for her and her sister, Bertha. In 1914 Campsy and Lawrence Dixon were married in Lewistown. The next year, on September 16, I was born in Circleville, Ohio, my mother's home town. My sister, Leona, came into this world in the homestead house, January 3, 1917.

Lawrence Dixon took a great many pictures of his neighbors and the things they did, developing the negatives himself. Many times he printed the pictures onto postcards which he and the others used to tell those "back home" what life was like in Montana.



The sign says **TURNIPS**. As if anybody would think they were anything else. This was printed on a postcard to impress the stay-at-home Ohioans with the richness of Montana soil and the bumper crops it produced, at least until the dry years.

The main result of this caper must have been the same as from eating too many green apples when the Trimmer brothers were much younger. Walter Trimmer is at left, Boone at the right; man in the middle is unidentified.



Walter Dixon (at right), home on leave from France in 1918, prepares to enjoy food the army never heard of. A picnic in the mountains was the very best way to entertain a soldier.

Also enjoying the meal with a patchwork quilt for a tablecloth are Boone Trimmer (left), Lawrence Dixon and as usual, the little Dixon girls. I'm in front and Leona is just visible behind me.

Grandpa George Trimmer gives careful consideration to some croquet rule. An afternoon of croquet playing was probably just the thing in Ohio but it must have looked very odd on the Montana prairies. There were no ladies around but those proper Trimmer brothers, their father and future brother-in-law are all dressed up in suits, hats and ties just the same.



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ruth E. Cameron completed eight grades at a country school near the Dixon family homestead, and graduated from Harlowton High School in 1933. She married Harry Cameron, a U.S. Forest Service employee and son of a Meagher County ranching family. She and her husband began ranching on the North Fork of the Musselshell in 1945. They raised three children: Janet (Mrs. George Zieg, Jr.) lives on a ranch near White Sulphur Springs, George is a Forest Service employee in that town, and Gilbert ranches near Martinsdale. Mrs. Cameron, who was widowed in 1976, continues to run the family ranch with her sons' help.