

MR. AND MRS. JOHN MERKLE

*By John A. Merkle
(Son of Mr. and Mrs. John Merkle)*

John Merkle was born July 19, 1846, in Wapakoneta, Ohio. He was raised on a farm and took up carpentry work at an early age. At eighteen he started two hitches in the army, first in the Ohio National Guard for one year then re-enlisted for the duration of the Civil War. His discharge mentioned that his company did distinguished service in the Valley of the Shenandoah, on the Peninsula, in the Operations on the James River, around Petersburg and Richmond, and in the Battle of Monocacy. The discharge paper was signed by Secretary of the Army, Edwin M. Stanton, and President Abraham Lincoln.

After the war he drifted West and stopped in Kansas where he took part in the many buffalo hunts; he was a skinner. One buffalo had been shot and was lying down, supposedly dead. He put his muzzle loading shot gun, which he used to finish the cripples, across the flank. It came to, jumped up, and chased him under the wagon. Just as the buffalo struck the wagon, it dropped dead. The shot gun is now in the University of Oklahoma Museum of Science and History. After the buffalo hunts were over, he settled on a farm in Sedgwick County, Kansas, near Maize.

The W. F. Stevens family left Evansville, Indiana, in the early spring in a covered wagon and team. They were accompanied by a relative and family who were driving a team of oxen. It took all summer to reach Maize, Kansas. A daughter, Priscilla Ann, born May 6, 1857, walked all the way except across the streams.

In the meantime John had built the Starwano school house, and while there at a social gathering, he met Priscilla Ann Stevens. After other such meetings he would walk her home. The road was just two ruts and the grass was high, so her brothers would go on ahead and tie the grass over the ruts. Priscilla would trip and fall, John would help her up and say "Oh, Oh, dear." This led to their marriage on November 22, 1876.

John got itchy feet again and after the first baby was born he went West and landed in Spokane, Washington. Here he got a job as foreman of the bridge construction gang on the railroad. Priscilla followed him. She went to San Francisco by train and then had to take a boat to Washington. She had the baby with her and got a bunk on the boat. A man got in the bunk. She had to call on the captain to get rid of him.

They lived in Spokane until three children were born. Later the family moved to a farm fifteen miles away to a little community known as Four Mound Prairie. No schools were there so Father gave an acre of ground and helped build the school house. The teacher, besides his salary, would stay for short periods of time at the home of parents who had children going to school. This was free.

Oklahoma was our next stop. Father had a brother living next to the river, west of Norman. He came in 1890 to visit him and bought a farm, then a mile and a half west of town. He rented a little one room house on the

JOHN ARTHUR MERKLE

Written by John Arthur Merkle

I was born February 23, 1883, in Spokane Falls, Washington. I am the son of John A. and Priscilla Stevens Merkle. My earliest memory is in Spokane in 1885. My mother had taken me out on the board sidewalk as it had rained and was too muddy to play in the yard. An old squaw came by, took a fancy to me, gathered me up and wrapped me in her shawl. My yells brought my two brothers, Joe and Fred, to my aid. They started to pelt her with stones and she put me down. There was an expressman in Spokane who would take me on his deliveries, and he was the one who gave me the nickname "Jack" and it has stuck to me ever since.

We soon moved out fifteen miles from Spokane to a little settlement known as Four Mound Prairie. This was a very pretty, level place and the people were friendly. We lived close to a German family. They had quite a bit of land in separate acreages close in and when one of them would go from one place to the other, he would take me on his horse behind the saddle and I was in my glory. We didn't have a drill but my father would broadcast the wheat by hand. I was six or seven and of course I had to help, I thought. He made me a little sack, put some wheat in it and he would always need my wheat before he made the round. My first school was a one room school house Father built on our farm. There was just one teacher, a man.

My mother's people lived in Kansas and my father's brother lived on the north side of the South Canadian River in Oklahoma, so my father decided to come to Oklahoma Territory on a visit. Mother and the kids stayed with her folks and Father came down to Oklahoma Territory. While he was here, he bought one hundred and sixty acres, one and a half miles west of Norman. I still live on three and one-half acres of this land.

When we first came to Norman, we lived a few months in town then moved to the farm. Here we lived in a little one room shack that was on the farm. The woman who had owned the place had two sons. The older was in bad with the law and had built a platform on the rafters so he could look toward town and see if the sheriff were coming after him. If so, he would go out into the near-by corn field and stay until the sheriff left. We three boys had to sleep up there, and to get to the platform we had to open the door and climb by putting our foot on the door knob.

I had to walk to school in Norman. One day I saw a crowd by the railroad track. I went over and there was a dead colored man. No one knew what killed him but in those days a Negro was not allowed to stay in town over night. Another time I went by the stairway of a gambling joint. There was a pool of blood on the sidewalk. The sheriff tried to arrest a man who had his leg cut off at the hip. The two scuffled over the sheriff's gun; it fell to the sidewalk, went off, and the bullet hit the man in the bottom of the cut-off leg and went on up into his body.

During the summer I peddled milk in two half gallon jugs tied onto

my saddle horn by straps, and the corks were corn cobs with a cloth wrapped around them. One morning I was in a hurry to get back home as we were going to spend the morning on the river, so I took across lots. I didn't see the ditch by Reeves Park as the grass had grown so high, and neither did my horse for he took a tumble, so did I and so did the jugs. My first thought was about the milk jugs. Sure enough, the corks had come out. I grabbed the corks, stuffed them back in the jugs and went on my way. What impressed me most was the women who came running out to see if I were hurt. I was not, and didn't spill too much milk. One Sunday I was early and nothing much to do so I decided to count the churches and saloons. There were thirteen of each.

When the University of Oklahoma was established there were just five professors: Dr. Boyd, president, taught grammar; J. S. Buchanan, "Uncle Buck," taught history and geography; F. S. Elder, "Peggy," taught mathematics; Edwin DeBarr, "Daddy," taught chemistry, and V. L. Parrington taught English and coached the football team; in a pinch he played.

In this pioneer and new area there were so few young people ready for college that the University established a preparatory school. I attended this school. My classes were simple division, geography, grammar and Latin.

The University of Oklahoma expanded rapidly, more students and more professors joined the University. We enjoyed what goes along with university life: class games, picnics, parties, etc. One day a member of my class, 1906, reported at a meeting that as he was coming to Norman from Oklahoma City that morning, he saw a big rock near the tracks that had fallen off a freight train. We decided to get the rock and put it on the campus. I furnished a team and wagon and we brought it to the campus and placed it there. We were proud of that rock, but not for long. The Sophomore class, we were Juniors, dug a big hole behind the rock and pushed it in and buried it. Our job then was to dit it up, put it on a cement base and have 06 carved on it. The rock still stands.

During the World's Fair in St. Louis, Dr. Gould, professor of Geology, had charge of the Oklahoma exhibit, and he arranged for two students to go at a time and stay for two weeks. One student at a time was to take care of the exhibit one week, then look at the fair the second week, all expenses were paid. It worked out fine and it was a benefit to all who went. I was fortunate to get the call.

Mr. George Bucklin, the Economics professor, resigned and entered diplomatic service. After I graduated, he had me appointed his vice-consul in Glauchaw, Germany. That consulate lasted only one year and I was transferred to Bergen, Norway, where I stayed for three years. There I met a Norwegian girl, Elizabeth Heitmann, from Lervik on the Isle of Strod, married her, then resigned and came back to the farm and I still live on three and one-half acres of it.

Now I can think back on a rather busy and interesting life, and I was not confined. I like the outdoors and especially hunting, and of that I have done my share. I have shot deer, coyotes, geese, and any number of smaller game. I shot two coyotes on the old home place.

east side of the railroad, one block north of Main Street. When Mother followed him with the kids, the trip from Spokane to Norman by train took over a week. We kids liked the location near the track for we would put gravel on the track to hear the train break it. The best was a shoe button hook. They were not hard to get as we all wore button shoes.

We moved to the farm which Father had bought from a widow who had two sons. One was in bad with the law and had built a platform in the rafter where he could watch and see if the lawmen were coming. We three boys slept up there and had to open a door and climb up it to go to bed. Our neighbor, Logan Peyton, lived just across the fence so we kids were together all the time. Father and Mr. Peyton jacked up the shack on two wagons and moved it a quarter mile west, far enough so we kids had to ask permission to go visit one another.

Father immediately started to farm. He bought three horses, a wagon and farm implements, and a breaking plow, which is also in the Museum. We soon got some cows, and then sold milk and butter to the town dwellers. I carried the milk in two half gallon jugs hung on the saddle horn by straps, and for corks we used cobs with a cloth wrapped around them. On one trip I was in a hurry and didn't see the ditch in Reaves Park as the grass was very high. The old horse stepped in the ditch and we both took a tumble. The first thing I thought of was my one yet undelivered jug of milk. Of course the cob cork had come out, so I grabbed it and put it back in the jug. What few women were there at the time were more concerned to find out if I were hurt than about the milk.

One Sunday I was curious and thought I would count the saloons and churches. There were thirteen of each. For several years there were no specific public school buildings. Classes were held in any available empty buildings.

My mother got tired of the shack and wanted to move back to Washington. If she would stay, Father promised to build her a new house, which he did; and I still live in that house and love it.

Two children, Frank and Martha died in Washington. Four came on the trip to Oklahoma. Joe, the baby who had made the trip from Kansas to Washington and who played on the first Oklahoma University football team, died at 88 in 1965, at Maud. Fred, who also played football at the University, died at 91 in 1970 at Scottsdale, Arizona. The coach at that time was V. L. Parrington who was also the professor of English. John A lives in Norman, and Clara Bowling in Pauls Valley. Bess O'Halloran, Cordell, was born after the family arrived in Norman.

I am ninety-one years old and don't regret that I resigned from the consular service and lived with people of my own choice. My wife and I reared seven children and one was found on our porch. The baby caused quite a bit of excitement when found by one of my children. My wife and I adopted this child and reared the boy with our own boys. He is now living in California. Another son also lives in California, another in Michigan, one lives in Texas and another son lives in Norman. Two daughters have retired and live with me, and I don't know how I could get along without them.

My wife, Elizabeth, who passed away May 2, 1971, and baby Christian are buried in Warren Cemetery west of Norman. The Brookhaven addition to Norman borders on the edge of the Warren Cemetery today.