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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 reenlisted 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 two 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 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 Reeves 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 University of Oklahoma 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 at Norman, and Clara Bowling in Pauls Valley. Bess O'Halloran, Cordell, was born after the family arrived in Norman.