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JAMES AND MARY KANEY CAME EAST OUT OF THE DUSTY DAKOTAS

by

Emmet Kaney

My parents, James and Mary Kaney, were both born in Wisconsin, but after their marriage went west to the Dakotas; only to return after the dust storms drove them back to Wisconsin again.

As a young man, my father had a milk route with a team of horses that he drove on the route every day for two years.

Then he loaded all his equipment on a box car on the Northwestern Railroad. His household things were loaded on a wagon along with a Harness, plow, drag and some wood. He drove to Craton, Nebraska where he took a tree claim which had to be planted with 750 trees and settled on for two years before he could get his deed. Then his brother Patrick and cousin wrote from Kimbal, South Dakota that they wanted him to come and be their neighbor.

So my father sold his 160 acres at Craton and settled on some land three miles east of Kimbal, South Dakota where there was an open claim. After farming for two years, he went back to Wisconsin to marry Mary Byrne in a Catholic Church at Keysville in 1884. They returned to his farm at Kimbal, South Dakota. The first year the crops were very good as they had plenty of rain.

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One day while plowing, he stopped to rest the horses. An Indian came along, so father asked how he like the plowing. The Indian said, "Ugh, ugh" Wrong side up. It should be left for the buffalo."

The next year was a dry one. The crops were poor. Four of the neighbors and father started early one morning after hay with horse teams and wagons with hay racks on a twenty mile trip. They were half way home when a strong wind came up and blew much of the hay away. Only two loads were left. Father was one of the lucky ones.

One afternoon in January, 1988, my father said to mother, "I wonder if Patrick has enough corn to burn for heat. I better take over a bag for him." As he lived just across the road, it was not far to go. While they visited, Patrick looked up and said, "There is a bad blizzard coming across the prairie. You better stay here." "I better get back to the family," my father said and hurried home. As he got to the yard, he stopped long enough to shut the bars on the gate. He went around and around his house. My mother, inside, heard him hollering and opened the back door. He saw the light and fell into the open door. My father was so tired he claimed he could not have lived to go around the house in the storm even one more time. When he closed the gate, it had saved his life. He could have so easily been out on the road and lost on the prairie.

James and Mary Kaney had seven children by then, three boys and four girls. As they walked two miles to school, they learned to watch the weather even closer after that.

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James, my father, was a handy man, a champion wood chopper, and a railroad tie maker. He was a builder of log houses, barns, sod shanties or sod houses. He dug wells, thirty and forty feet deep by hand, all alone. But father was always ready to help someone else in need. He was one of the best singers, and sang most of the old songs from memory. If he heard a song once he had the words and music down.

One morning my father decided to take a load of hogs to market. He hitched his team to the wagon and hog rack. After loading the hogs he drove up to the barn. He got off the wagon. John the oldest son wanted to help. He came out with 12 quarts of grain in a bag on his shoulder. The team got scared and started to run. Father ran after them and caught the side of the rack. He got up on the spring seat. The lines were down under the horses' hooves. The horses were running full blast, so he jumped out on one of their backs and steered them around the field in circles. The pigs were squealing and scared the horses all the more. They finally got out of wind and stopped running.

Father and mother lived thirteen years on the farm at Kimbal. He had seven and a half dry years. He knew there was no use to stay longer. He had received a letter from his folks at Sandusky, Wisconsin. They had had an accident while driving the horses to town. It had started to rain and mother raised the umbrella. Old Dick, the driving horse, ran away. They were both thrown out and were hurt. They were at a neighbor's farm in Sandusky, and wanted him to come back and take care of them. Then they said they would deed him the 160 acre home farm. So father prepared to go.

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Father told his brother, Pat, "I have to go back home to Wisconsin and take care of the folks. If I were you, I would go down to Wagner, South Dakota, along the Missouri River. They get rain there and it's good soil." So Patrick and family went to Wagner. His son still lives on that farm.

Father then went to work and built two covered wagons and chose two of the best young teams, four and five year olds. The other four he turned loose on the road. There was no sale for anything. Mother drove one team and father the other, six hundred miles in three weeks. They crossed the Mississippi River at Soldiers Grove, where mother had a cousin. The children enjoyed seeing the flock of sheep on that farm.

When they got back to Sandusky, Wisconsin, they found Granfather's younger brother, Uncle Joe Kaney, had gotten the home farm and taken Grand~~pa~~<sup>and</sup> Grandmother home. What a disappointment after the long trip! But father bought a farm in Sauk County. Mother was left her parents home farm so they made good after all.

After returning to Wisconsin my parents had eight more children. I was the twelfth one. They raised us all to be hard workers and none of us ever went to jail, even during the depression.

So while many people went west in covered wagons, my parents, James and Mary Kaney, returned to Wisconsin out of the dusty Dakotas.