

The Praying Traveler

By Abbie Lorton Hallstrom

April 29, 1983

Dear Sir/Madam:

I thought the enclosed story would be of interest to you as Abbie Lorton Hallstrom, my grandmother, married a Midvale rancher, Carl John Hallstrom, in the early part of this century and raised her family there. She wrote this reminiscence of her trip from Missouri to Idaho about ten years before her death. I recently put it into booklet form as a keepsake for my family.

I hope it will be an enjoyable addition to your historical accounts.

Sincerely,

Laurie Levesque

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I think I was destined to be a school-marm since my dear mother taught in the schools of N.E. Missouri for many years, and without a high school education. She was determined I would have a better education and saw to it that I had. So after graduation from high school in 1901, I tried very hard to get a school. Those days a teacher without

experience wasn't wanted so I had to wait. In the late fall I heard of a school where the teacher resigned (she was run out). I was accepted as the teacher and I went there for the experience. It was worth it. They never ran me out for several reasons. The main reason was that the school board was back of me and said, "If the pupils wouldn't mind, out they would

go.”

The next two years were spent at a smaller school near home at \$25, seven months, first to eighth grades and twelve or thirteen pupils. Here an incident happened. One afternoon I noticed pupils were looking out the windows and seemed disturbed. When I looked I was also frightened, for I saw a big bunch of men. They were coming across the field toward the school house. I never knew what surveyor's looked like. Where they came from and where they were going was never known but they spent the night in our little school room. They went to my desk, left a dime for matches they used and this question written on the blackboard, “Should emulation be practiced in school?” That was a new word for me but I had a feeling I was guilty and began to wonder if it was right???. The school room next morning was sure smelly and smokey and needed a good cleanup, after so many visitors.

That spring of 1904 I accepted another school at \$45.00. I had dreamed of the far West (Idaho) where I had relatives, never dreaming I would soon get a letter. I was elected teacher in the Cambridge School at \$60.00 a month and nine long months. (I was sure moving up fast.) Was this not the chance I'd been waiting and looking for, so without thinking I said, “Oh! Idaho!

There was another young woman traveling toward Denver from New York City to San Francisco and we were to meet there (Harriet Ried, where are you today?) We happened to be sitting close together and

here I come.” My enthusiasm cooled somewhat after due deliberation, for did it not mean leaving home, my parents, friends of my first 21 years? And those examinations, the Bug Bear of every person who had to take them.

What if I got out there and failed to get a certificate? Would I not be disgraced? There was no money so I decided to borrow money and attend summer school at Warrensburg for six weeks before leaving for the West. I have never been out of the state of Missouri, but this trip out West alone never scared me one little bit. I wanted to see the Rockies and the wild and wooly West. The land of cowboys and Indians. I guess I had picked up a little “grit” since school days. Friends in Kansas City fixed up a nice lunch box to last me to Idaho and saw me off on the Union Pacific with a goodbye and good wishes for my success.

The little prairie dogs out in western Kansas broke the monotony and I had time to think of my family years before trying to homestead, and the sod-house in which they tried to live. I was told that my mother named Sharon Springs. But the fight to live was too hard, so back to Missouri and Schell City where I was born. As I went on to Denver, I wondered if Idaho would look like this?

visiting, waiting for our trains to take off. I suggested we take a walk outside and as we looked toward the Rockies I was regretting my ticket was over the Union Pacific by the way of Cheyenne. Suddenly I looked at this

new friend and cried out! "Oh, where is my purse? My small pocketbook which held my ticket and every cent I had in the world and borrowed at that was gone. It had a chain so I could hang over my arm and now it was gone. And, where? We hurried back to our seats and found a dear little old lady sitting there and no purse in sight. As soon as I could speak I asked her if there was a purse there when she sat down. Her answer was, "Oh! No! I saw no purse. Did you lose yours?" God was very close to me right then and I said, "Will you please get up and let me look?" And, there it was! God bless you, dear woman, for protecting my purse. It was flatter than ever but so nice and warm. No doubt her eyes were dim and she didn't notice it. She and my friend stood there amazed and speechless, almost as much as if we had just seen a miracle. I have often wondered if I hadn't found my purse what would I have done? If the new friend would have loaned me the money to continue on my journey. -- That would have been another story!! All this time I had not thought of my valise. I surely had something besides my lunch box but to this day I was so scared I can't remember. Perhaps someone was sitting on them to protect and help me? God surely was looking after the green young "school-marm" from Missouri.

It was now time for the trains. So bidding each other goodbye and the best wishes in life, I found myself in the coach with all my worldly possessions, going North slowly but surely though the miles seemed to

stretch longer. The next afternoon the train stopped in Payette long enough for boys to get on and sell melons and as they went through the coach calling out with voices some high and some low, "Canteloupe, canteloupe." Ripples of laughter went through the car. But how good they were. A welcome repast. I don't think to this day I've ever tasted one so good and sweet. Maybe I was hungry.

Soon I was in Weiser, a stranger in a strange land. So to the Weiser Hotel where I stayed the night, for the train, Pacific and Idaho Northern, to Cambridge left in the morning, and that being Saturday, no train on Sunday, I would have to lay over to Monday morning.

Next morning, I went to church. Not finding my church (it being closed for the summer) I found the Methodist and worshiped there. There I met a young woman, just out from the East also, a teacher in the Weiser School -- Miss Laymaster and she spent many years there.

Then it dawned on me. I'd better look around, so I hunted up the County Superintendent, Miss Mary Harper, one of the grandest persons I have ever met. She advised me to stay in Weiser and get busy on school -- law, Idaho government, etc., for examinations coming up soon. She knew how frightened I was and if I failed, I'd never see Cambridge. She found me a boarding place near the school house where institute was to be held and here it was I met the other Cambridge teachers. Mr. Duetro, the principal, and Mary Wickham of Boise, now Mary Lorton of

Cambridge. (She became my cousin later.) We had to answer roll call every morning with quotations and I remember mine one morning. "In the black soil grow the fairest flowers and the strongest trees spring heavenward amongst the rocks." And this, I found so true when I gazed later at those tall, tall pines in the mountains.

Well, the days of examinations came all too soon for me and I was so happy when all through. Sometimes I'd get a worried look on my face, and look up. Miss Harper would be looking at me and her smile of encouragement saved the day for me. My 100 in arithmetic brought up my low grades in the subjects not familiar to me.

Now Cambridge. Not the Cambridge of today with Hells Canyon over the mountain, a bustling, big little town, big things going on, men and machinery, thick as bees.

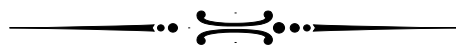
Three years were spent in the Cambridge schools, then marriage and Midvale until 1929, then Boise and now Caldwell. "And never once have I lost a purse."! HUH!

"A lovely mountain home is ours. Idaho! Oh! Idaho!

Of Winters mild and spring time flowers. Idaho! Oh! Idaho!

Her breeze's blow from Western Shore.

Each year we love for more



and more.

Idaho! Oh! Idaho!"

Abbie Lee Lorton was born to Emma Estes and Riley Robert Lorton on November 25, 1883 in Schell City, Missouri. She taught school in Cambridge, Idaho from 1904 to 1907, and married Carl John Hallstrom, a farmer and rancher from Midvale, on June 12, 1907. She had four children and nine grandchildren . . . to whom she bequeathed her "grit".

Abbie Lorton Hallstrom died March 5, 1979 in Caldwell, Idaho at the age of ninety-five. She is buried in the family plot in Midvale.