

(Martin Vaught's
story, pp. 3-6)ALVAH SHELLENRH
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Alvah Shelden was born at Fond-du-Lac, Wisconsin, January 15, 1849. His mother, whose maiden name was Louisa Vaught, was of Dutch parentage and his father, Benjamin Shelden, of German descent. This ancestry, no doubt accounted in later life for much of the thrift, economy and steadfastness of purpose shown in the character of the son. When Alvah Shelden was three years of age, his parents removed to Little Rock, Arkansas, and a year or so later to Helena, Texas, where his father was shot and killed in 1859 in his own door yard by a southern sympathizer because of his fearless and outspoken anti-slavery sentiments.

Martin Vaught, then living in Jefferson County, Kansas, started at once for Texas to bring back his widowed sister and her five children Olive, Alvah, Marion and Mary (twins) and John. He made the journey on horseback, starting in October, 1859, and made the trip in thirty-five days. Remaining in Texas until May 1860, he settled up the affairs of his brother-in-law and then started for Kansas in a covered wagon drawn by five yoke of oxen and the party, driving fifty head of cattle and eight horses through, made the trip in six weeks. The family had several miraculous escapes and a number of adventures and exciting experiences, particularly on coming through Texas and the Indian Territory. On crossing the Red River and the Cimarron, some of the Mexican cattle hands were nearly drowned while the Indians made a number of attempts to steal the cattle. These incidents which seem quite thrilling now in the days of civilized Oklahoma (then Indian Territory) were taken as a matter of course at that time when the country was still in a large degree wild and savage.

After a tempestuous journey the Shelden family eventually arrived at Chelsea, Butler County, Kansas, piloted by the ever faithful "Uncle Mart," and remained at that point until fall of the year when they went to Paris, Illinois, to make their home with Alvah Shelden's grandfather, John Vaught, who was a prominent and well-to-do farmer. There they remained until 1868, in which year the "call of Kansas" appealed to Alvah who was now a stalwart and independent youth of nineteen years and the head of the family. Accordingly, with the family, he turned his face westward, driving a big team of bay horses, (named Dick and Al) to a wagon, with which his grandfather had outfitted him. They stopped in Chase County, on the south fork of the Cottonwood River where they rented a farm. It proved to be a year of bounteous crops and through hard work and close saving, the family managed to have a little money left over at the close of the season and this they put into the building of a home. Coming to Chelsea Township, they bought 240 acres

of school land on Cole Creek and there built a native lumber house of five rooms, most of it walnut. Alvah aided by his younger brothers and his Uncle Martin Vaught framed it and finished it. Anyone who is at all familiar with early Kansas history will appreciate the hardships and privations incident to the development of and payment for a home at that time. Upon Alvah, the eldest of the three sons, the greater part of the burden rested. Through his perseverance, pluck and ambition he succeeded in the accomplishment of his object.

From the time of his youth, Mr. Sheldon had been an inveterate reader and through his grandfather's library and the country schools which he attended first in his eleventh year, he acquired a good education which in later years, aided by keen observation and an innate understanding of human nature, became a liberal one, so it was but natural that his mind should run more or less along intellectual lines.

In 1872, he taught his first country school. In 1874, he was made assistant cashier in the Farmers and Merchants Bank of El Dorado and in 1876, was elected County Superintendent of Public Instruction of Butler County. He was married, January 28, 1877, to Miss May Lamb of Douglass, Kansas and established a home of his own.

In 1878, he was re-elected to the superintendency of the county schools and in 1879 was appointed to succeed Mrs. M. J. Long as postmaster of El Dorado, a position which he held for five years. In March, 1881, Mr. Sheldon bought the Walnut Valley Times from T. B. Murdock, a publication which he owned and edited for thirty years. On March 1, 1911, he retired from active work, transferring the newspaper and business to his son, Chester C. Sheldon. It was in June of the same year that he was stricken with angina pectoris, a disease of the heart, from which he never recovered, his death occurring December 17, 1911.

No more fitting appreciation of his career and qualities could be written than the following, from the pen of his old time friend and newspaper associate, George F. Fullinwider. "As a writer, Mr. Sheldon was apt and forceful, and as an editor able and emphatic with opinions all his own, expressed tersely and plainly. As a business man, he was conservative, prompt, firm and successful. He was one whose advice and opinions were sought by his fellows and considered sound. As a citizen, he was honored and respected; as a friend, he was loyal and true. He was kind as a woman, big hearted, generous to a fault, discriminating in his friendships and unyielding in his condemnation of wrong doing. He was always interested in the welfare of the community and his efforts were enlisted in behalf of progress and enterprise. During his regime, The Times was a welcome visitor

in more homes in Butler County, perhaps, than any other paper ever published here. He was always reaching out for the best in the newspaper world. Nothing was too good for his paper and its readers. So well did he succeed that he ranked with the best in the state and he enjoyed a wide reputation as a writer and editor of ability. In proof of his enterprise, his special editions of which he issued more than any man in the state, namedly the "Pink Edition," the "Old Soldiers" edition, "Farmers and Stockmen's" edition, and "Woman's" edition, have gone down in history as some of the brightest and best pieces of newspaper work of that kind in Kansas. His public life and work are done; no more will he furnish "copy" or correct proof. The foreman has called "thirty" on his book and readers will look in vain for locals and editorials from his pen; but the fleeting years in their onward march cannot efface the memory of his good deeds, the influence he exerted, nor can time beat out the numberless pages he has written and left as a record for generations unborn."

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"UNCLE MART'S STORY AS TOLD BY HIMSELF

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It was while working on a rented farm in Jefferson County, Kansas, on or about the first of August, that I received a letter from the postmaster at Helena, Texas, informing me that Benjamin Shelden, my sister's husband, had been murdered and his family left destitute. After taking care of our crop, I left Jefferson County, I think it was about October first, and came to Chelsea, and then on to El Dorado and spent the night with Jake Carey who lived on what is now the Clyde King farm. He told me it was 150 miles to the first Cherokee settlement where a half breed Cherokee and his family entertained passing travelers.

Taking three days provisions, I started on horseback for Helena, Texas, to look after and bring back my sister and family. Towards evening I would (when I could find water and a little dry brush) make some coffee, eat my supper, spread out my rubber blanket for a bed, use my saddle for a pillow and spend the night. Rising early I would get my breakfast and start on my way. The second day in the afternoon, I saw skulls of oxen on the road on which were written warnings to look out for the Big Osages, who were very savage and had attacked the travelers the night before.

Late in the afternoon, I saw a lone Indian approaching from the east. He came and was with me an hour or so. He was armed with bow and arrows but was very anxious to see my revolvers. I let him see them but gave him no chance to get hold of them. When the sun was low, he turned to the east and rode away. A little later I came to a small stream where there were dry willows and I camped. While eating supper, and very nearly dark, I chanced to look toward the

east. On a high ridge, I could see a man sitting on a horse. I felt he was watching me so I gathered some more fuel and arranged my fire so it would last some time and being fearful of being attacked during the night, I saddled my horse, keeping out of the light of my fire, mounted and rode for a couple of hours as rapidly as my horse could stand it, coming to a valley where the blue stem grass grew six or seven feet high. I left the trail and rode out into it until I came to some fine short grass. Here I stopped, unsaddled my horse, and holding one end of the picket rope, I lay down to sleep. Next morning, there being neither wood nor water, I ate a lunch and started on. That afternoon while riding on a divide with a creek to my right and the Verdigris on my left, I heard a rooster crow. The sound came from my right but no house was in sight, yet I knew I was approaching civilization and never have I heard sweeter music than that rooster rendered! I soon came to a turn in the road and saw a huge two story log house. I found that a man named Riley lived there. As I approached the house a man met me at the gate and I asked if I could stay over night. He asked me where I was from and I replied from the "Walnut." He then asked how many were in the party and when I said I was alone, he seemed to doubt my statement, and replied, "Do you mean to say that you came from the Walnut alone?" I assured him that I had. He then remarked, "I am an Indian and have lived on the border all my life but I wouldn't go from here to the Walnut alone for all of Kansas." He asked if I had seen any Indians and I told him my experience of the previous afternoon. He said I had done just the right thing as that Indian would have killed me just for my pistols.

These people with whom I stayed were educated, had papers and books, also a few slaves. Just before supper which was most appetizing, another man came to stay all night too. He spoke of himself as a Cherokee. I said, "You are not a Cherokee." He replied, "Yes. My great grandfather married a half breed and we have been getting whiter ever since!" The next morning, the Cherokee and I struck out on a trail shorter by several miles than the regular road and arrived that evening at a neat little two roomed log cabin occupied by a full blooded Indian who lived all alone. He also had book cases filled with books and was a college graduate. The next morning I struck the old Butterfield stage trail. By the side of the road were a man and wife camping. They gave me dinner and afterward we traveled together, they furnishing my meals for fifty cents a day. One of their horses becoming lame, I finally had to go on and leave them.

I reached the Red River just at sundown one day, the ferry had just started across so I had to wait for its return and it was almost dark when I got across. A man was on a horse on the further side and upon asking where I might find lodging he told me he would ride with me to a tavern. During our ride he told me of John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry. He asked me so many questions I thought him very inquisitive.

The tavern consisted of a row of cabins and I was given an outside room off a porch. Retiring early, I soon fell asleep and was awakened by a pounding on the door. I could see through the window armed men and I surely was frightened. I made a light and opened the door. Three men came in and demanded where I was from. I knew they did not like Kansas people so I replied Illinois. They proceeded to go through my pockets and saddle bags, carefully examined my letters and then told me I was not the man they were looking for and apologized for disturbing me and left. The next day as I passed through Sherman I saw the same bunch of men in front of a saloon and they again apologized for their treatment of the night before and asked me to go and see where they had hung the man they were looking for who had murdered somebody. I had no more trouble and reached my destination in thirty-five days after leaving Kansas.

I helped sister Louisa settle up her affairs and started on the return trip with her family of five children, Olive, 13 years old, Alvah, 11, Marion and Mary, 6, and John, 3. A man by the name of Livingston, was hired to help us on the way. We left Helena, May 1860 with two yoke of oxen and a large freight wagon. There were eight head of horses all broken to the saddle. Alvah and Mr. Livingston rode horses and drove the 50 head of cattle and the rest of the horses. We carried three extra yokes and bows and on the second morning out we roped a pair of steers, put yokes on them and put them in the "swing," that is between the other two yokes. We afterwards broke others in the same way until we had five yokes of oxen. By changing the teams, we were able to make better time, usually traveling 25 or 30 miles a day. The family rode in the wagon and at night we put up a large tent where beds were made on the ground of blankets and other covers and most of the family slept there, the others in the wagon.

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Alvah rode/for so small a boy and was filled with curiosity concerning everything that was new or interesting. He always insisted on stopping to investigate anything that he did not understand.

The streams were small and we were able to ford all until we came to the Trinity River. There we crossed on a ferry with the saddle horses, the wagon and two yoke of oxen. The rest of the stock were driven into the river and made to swim across. We had no trouble on our route until we reached the Red River where we again ferried across as we had at the Trinity. However, while the cattle were crossing over one yoke of oxen became entangled on a snag with a rope that was fastened to the bar that held the oxen together. Mr. Livingston, taking a butcher knife in his teeth, swam out and cut the rope, letting them loose. Several Texans watched the episode and one remarked that "the d--n fool would drown," another said "Oh! he's a d--n Yankee and you might as well try to drown a frog!" Someone repeated these remarks to Mr. Livingston and he wanted to turn back and whip them. Alvah being very fond of him and his constant companion wanted to

go too and help perform the whipping act but we continued on our way with no backward turns. We arrived at the Boston Mountains one day about noon. There we discovered a high cliff with projecting rocks which made a fine shelter from a hard rain. We pitched our tent in the shelter where we were joined later in the day by some people driving two horse teams. The party consisted of Mr. and Mrs. J. D. Chamberlain, wife and two children besides two young ladies whose name I forget. Both the Chamberlains and the young ladies had been teaching in the Congregational school for the Indians in the Choctaw nation. Some time previous to this a negro had been burned at the stake a short distance from the school and Mr. Chamberlain had written an account of it to the New York Independent. A mob from Texas and Arkansas who evidently had read the account came to hang him but the Choctaw Indians protected him and helped them to escape by guarding them for quite a distance. We found they were from Massachusetts and the young ladies were expecting to return there while the Chamberlains wanted to find a location some place on the frontier. We traveled together for several days when they finally decided to accompany us to Kansas and locate there. When we crossed the line of Southern Kansas, everybody gave three cheers and rejoiced that we were again in a free country.

That night, two of the Chamberlains horses broke loose and got away. The next day we hunted all day but failed to find them. That night our cattle were stampeded by the Indians. Next morning Mr. Livingston rode one way and I the other and circled the camp for a trail. We found it and followed it for a few miles coming to a dry creek, we found the track of a horse without one shoe which we recognized as that of Livingston's horse and we knew he was on the trail of the cattle so we left and went again to hunt for the horses which we found. About midnight, Mr. Livingston came in with the cattle but were short six steers and three cows. Next morning we decided for the camp to move on while I rode out to look for the missing cattle. I rode part of the day and nearly all night but failed to find them. The Indians had gathered them in and taken them far away. Our last night we camped on Hickory Creek in Butler County and reached Chelsea that evening without further incident stopping at Donaldsons.

Mr. Chamberlain bought a quarter section of land from Mr. Saxby, one from Dave Scott and one from Will Rice. This land is now a part of the Holderman farm as also is the Donaldson farm which was south of Chamberlains. It was the latter part of June when we arrived and in the fall we went on to Illinois to Father's, driving two yoke of oxen. We left the cattle to be sold. Alvah rode a horse and drove the rest.

This is the end of Uncle Mart's description of the trip to and from Helena, Texas, and I am sure it has furnished you with a few thrills and exclamations.