

Shopping Saturday: A Trip to Town in 1906 by the Roberts Family of Jasper County, Iowa- Part 3



Schoolhouse, Marshall Co., Iowa, via Library of Congress; Farm Security Administration. This is NOT the schoolhouse near the Roberts homestead, but is very similar. Note “the necessary” out back.

[Roberts Family](#) *(Click for Family Tree)*

Edith ROBERTS continues her story of growing up on the farm in Jasper County, Iowa, and tells us about the actual trip from the farm to town. Together with her father, George A. ROBERTS,

her mother, Ella V. (DANIEL) ROBERTS, and her big brother Georgie A. ROBERTS and her older sister Ethel G. ROBERTS, the family made the (weather-permitting) weekly visit to Newton, Iowa into a lovingly remembered event.

“Brother would have driven the skittish team [of horses] to the kitchen door and was having a time holding them in check. We were all ready. Dad had carried out the hot bricks that had been heating in the oven. He wrapped them in many sheets of newspaper, and scattered them in the straw [of the wagon].

Now I had to submit to the indignity of lying on the sitting room floor and be wrapped up in a soft brown shawl. Mother would toss the top of the shawl over my head, and brother ... [or] Dad would pick me up like a sack of flour and carry me to the waiting bobsled, If it was Brother, he would jump me unceremoniously into the soft straw. I was so bundled up I could hardly sit upright. I was still squealing; “I can’t see, I can’t see.” so as my mother settled herself into the wagon she took the cover off my face. Sister who was sitting opposite us was already shivering, as she had not put on the sweater mother had told her to. Dad had thrown a lap robe over us. It was from Sears, Roebuck. A plush-like material with a fancy design on one side. How good the warm bricks feel.”

As Edith told her stories, it was obvious that they took her back in time to where she could feel the warm bricks even 60 or 70 years later.

“Brother and dad would be standing up in front. Perhaps on this trip dad would hand the lines, or reins, to brother, and he would proudly turn us around and head straight northeast towards Newton. [They would pass a schoolhouse similar to the one pictured above.]

“If it had snowed enough so that the fences were covered and

Skunk River had frozen over, by going directly across the river and fences, we would make better time, and of course the distance was much shorter. The sleigh bells were jangling merrily, as the horses, still feeling their mettle, were really making time. Brother would have to lean back, pulling on the reins to check their speed. Both dad and brother would be wearing fur coats, made from the hides of the beeves [beef cows] we had butchered. Their caps were fur-lined and their long high-cuffed mittens were warm, and make holding on to the reins easier.”

Again, in her writing, Edith seems transported back to that time, making it no longer just the past, but a part of her. She did miss her family, as she outlived her parents and siblings, and the ways of life on the farm were rapidly disappearing.

Edith finished her story:

“The sun was glistening on the hard crusted snow, making millions maybe zillions of flashing diamond like particles on the snow. By this time I was sleepy, and the last I would remember was the cheery sound of the sleigh bells. Mother was so warm and comforting beside me as I went to sleep, and I didn’t know anything until we drove up in front of the grocery store. Mother and sister and I got out while dad and brother took the team of horses to the livery stable to be fed and stabled until time to go home.

“A busy interesting day was ahead of us.”

And so Ellie (DANIEL) ROBERTS would barter her delicious butter, eggs, and other homemade delights at the Newton grocery, and “Shopping Saturday” would begin in earnest for the Roberts family in 1906.

Notes, Sources, and References:

1. "A Trip to Town, 1906–Wintertime" by Edith (Roberts) [McMurray] Luck. Written in the 1960s-1970s for her grandchildren.

Click to enlarge any image. Please contact us if you would like an image in higher resolution.

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Wordless Wednesday: Art in Artifacts



Eric Madriguera & His Orchestra- "A Man, A Moon, and A Maid," Side A. This record belonged to Mary (Helbling) McMurray and her husband Edward A. McMurray, Jr.

[McMurray Family, Helbling Family](#) (Click for Family Tree)



Eric Madriguera & His Orchestra-"Cuban Yodelin' Man", Side B.
This record belonged to Mary (Helbling) McMurray and her
husband Edward A. McMurray, Jr.

Notes, Sources, and References:

1. This record belonged to Mary (Helbling) McMurray and her husband Edward A. McMurray, Jr. It is a vinyl, 10", 78 RPM, Picture Disc released in 1947. The genre is Latin music. Wonder if they thought of themselves with Side A- they had just met in 1947 and it was love right away.

The “Cuban Yodelin’ Man” is hilarious- not much snow in Cuba! But yodeling was popular at that time in a number of musical genres, including classic country.

2. This is a perfect example of how technology changes- we don’t have anything to play this on anymore!

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Sentimental Sunday: ‘Parking’

Downtown in Monroe, Jasper County, Iowa in 1896

—Hitching room around the Park Saturday was at a premium. Lots of people were in town and business was good.

Monroe Mirror, [Jasper County, Iowa], 24 December 1896, Vol. 25, No. 9, Page 4, Column 2. (Click to enlarge.)

[Roberts Family, Murrell Family](#) (Click for Family Tree)

The day before Christmas was a busy one in Prairie City, Iowa in 1896!

Many of us get sentimental for simpler times, but this article shows that things weren't that much simpler, just maybe on a smaller scale.

Our Roberts-Murrell ancestors may have been a part of the crowd, looking for a place to hitch their horse and buggy: John Roberts, Elizabeth Ann (Murrell) Roberts, George Anthony Roberts, Ella Viola (Daniel) Roberts, and Edith (Roberts) Luck.

Iowa winters are cold and blustery, and getting in to town on December 24th would have had its challenges:

How to keep warm in the buggy without a button to turn up the heat?

What would the horses eat if the ground is covered with snow and the grass under all dead/dormant?

What if big trees were covered with ice and fell across the

road?

Waterways were often used for travel in winter, but how do you know the ice is thick enough to hold a heavy sleigh and team, and then all those gifts one might bring back from town?

Somehow these questions make jockeying for a parking space at the mall seem much easier, and exhausting fingertips on a computer keyboard (or phone) for online ordering almost too easy!

Next week- a description of a trip to town during the winter of 1906, by Edith (Roberts) [McMurray] Luck. Have a Merry Christmas!

Notes, Sources, and References:

1. *Monroe Mirror*, [Jasper County, Iowa], 24 December 1896, Vol. 25, No. 9, Page 4, Column 2.

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Workday Wednesday: A Trip to Town in 1906 by the Roberts Family of Jasper County, Iowa, Part 2



Farm in Snow, Grundy Co., Iowa, via Library of Congress; Farm Security Administration. This is NOT the Roberts family farm, but gives an idea of what it would have looked like in winter.

[Roberts Family](#) *(Click for Family Tree)*

When the ROBERTS family went into town in 1906, it was not just a fun trip. Part of the reason for the journey was to sell products made on the farm to grocers in town.

As Edith M. ROBERTS told the story sixty years later,

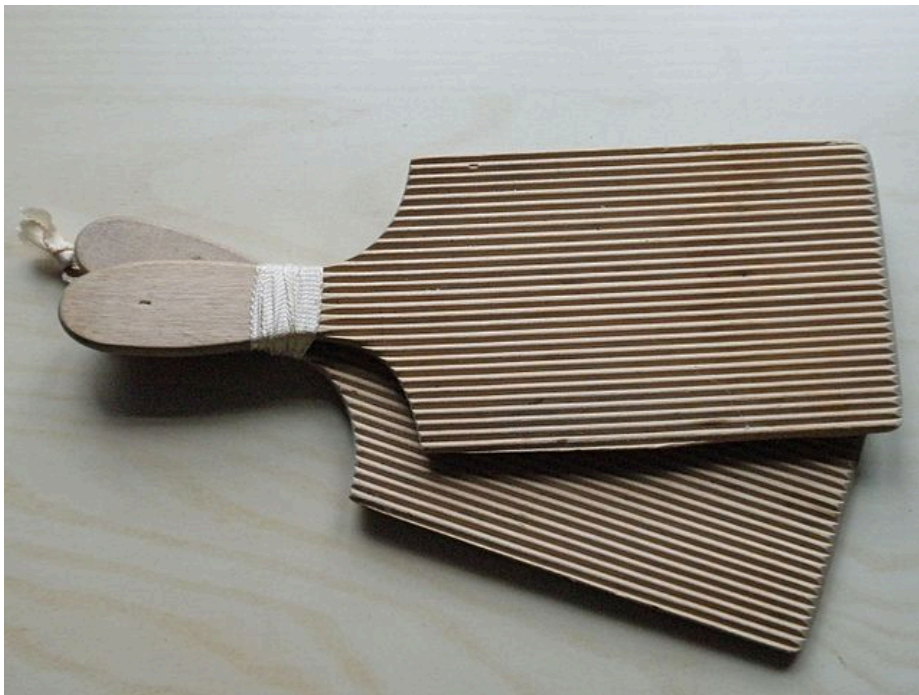
“We lived ten miles from Newton, Iowa. Once a week, weather permitting, we made a trip to Newton, winter and summer. Mother made butter to sell, and the store, where mother took her butter, had regular customers for it, so we had to make this trip weekly if at all possible. It was said: “If for any reason we did not get to town, or were late in arriving, her butter customers would wait until mother did get to town.”

The “workday” of Edith’s mother concerning the butter they were taking to town actually took more than one day when one considered all the different tasks that ended up becoming beautiful, creamy butter. To start with, each day of the week would have begun early for Ella V. (DANIEL) ROBERTS, with a cold trip from the house to the warm barn with the milch (milk) cows. She would be carrying pails for the milk and likely one with water she had heated up on her stove, so that she could wash the udders of the cows and relax them, so that milk letdown would occur. Although a heavy, short and stout woman, Ellie sat on a small 3-legged stool, and would use her warmed hands to coax the white milk full of fat out of the udders. The two daughters (Ethel and Edith) would have helped at times, and maybe even son Georgie when he was young. The pails full of warm milk would be carried carefully to the

house, trying to not spill what was likely about 40 lbs. of liquid and pail. The trip to the house would have started to cool the milk in the cold winters, and the high-fat cream would be rising to the top as they entered the warm kitchen. This whole scenario would be repeated again in the evening- and every day, every week, every month, every year. Cows *must* be milked when it is time.

Edith continued her story:

“During the week mother would have churned the butter from thick cream, and worked and worked it with a wooden butter paddle to get out all the salt and brine.



Butter paddles, AKA Scotch hands, butter pats, etc, via Wikipedia, CC BY-SA 2.0.

They say, that Mr. Hough, (the grocer where we took our butter,) would finger-test each role of butter for saltiness. (Not very sanitary, now is it?)

We had a special market basket that mother lined with newspapers, and then a snow-white sugar sack was put in, to hold the well formed oblong rolls of butter. Each roll had daisy design pressed in the top. Mother would carefully fold

over the sack and set it aside to put in the bobsled in the winter, or in the buggy in summer, when we were ready to leave the house for Newton. These sacks had been bleached during the summer with salt and lemon juice. We always bought our sugar in 50 pound sacks, and flour in sacks or hundred pound barrels.”

Butter was not the only farm commodity brought in to town folks. Ellie made cakes and pies too, and,

“In the summer we had eggs for sale, but our flock [of] Plymouth Rock chickens did not lay well in the winter. Some said we should have a flock of Leghorn chickens, but dad would not have a fluttering Leghorn on the place, nor would he have any guineas, ducks, geese or Jersey cattle on our farm. My dad was pretty definite [sic] in his ideas.”

To be continued...

Notes, Sources, and References:

1. “A trip to Town 1906– Wintertime” by Edith (Roberts) [McMurray] Luck, written for her grandchildren in the 1960s-1970s.

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Travel Tuesday: A Trip to Town in 1906 by the Roberts Family of Jasper County, Iowa-Part 1



Horses in Snow in Marshall County, Iowa, 1940, by U.S. Farm Security Administration.

[Roberts Family](#) *(Click for Family Tree)*

Although the above image is not for Jasper County, Iowa, and was taken much later than 1906, the view would have been much the same for little Edith Roberts [later McMurray Luck] and her family as they drove to town in the long, cold winters of her childhood.

Edith wrote stories, spurred on by her dearest granddaughter, of her years growing up on the family farm. People travelled and visited more than many of us thought they would in those days, and in Iowa in winter, that would mean a horse (or two) carrying them through ice, snow, blizzards, etc. (They took the train to some places, but with living way out in a rural area, one would have to get to a larger town or city for a

train depot.)

“We lived ten miles from Newton, Iowa. Once a week, weather permitting, we made a trip to Newton, winter and summer. “

Edith's parents were George Anthony ROBERTS (1861-1939) and Ella Viola DANIEL ROBERTS (1866-1922). Edith's big brother, whom she adored, was George A. ROBERTS, Jr. (1889-1965). She loved her sister, Ethel Gay ROBERTS ROBISON (1891-1969) very much too, even risking the wrath of their father as she passed notes to Ethel from the boyfriend her father did not like. (Ethel married that boyfriend, Bert ROBISON, and her father disowned her, never speaking to her again or acknowledging her children.) But I digress, and we need to get back to 1906, when Edith's just seven years old, and the family was heading to town.

Here is a description, in Edith's words, of some of the preparation for their trip:

“Brother would be outside getting the horses and bobsled (or buggy) ready. To make up the bobsled they would put a wagon box on the two sets of runners and two sets of sideboards on the wagon box to cut down the wind blowing across the wagon box. Then they dumped a lot of clean straw in the wagon box and scattered it around, making it a foot deep at least. It smelled so fresh and clean.”

Getting ready to leave meant dressing for the weather, as well as wanting to look good when one got into town.

“While mother was hurrying around seeing that I got dressed, and sister too, Dad would still be warming his back at the oven door. He was always so cold. He had had sciatica-rheumatism before I was born and had had to learn to walk again.”

Edith was the baby and beloved by her father, who had red hair, as she did. (Her brother Georgie had red hair as well.)

"I would be would be wearing either a blue dress or a red one, whichever was the older. The newer one would be kept for special occasions. Every winter I would have one new dress, just one. When I pranced out for my dad's admiration, he would say; "Well, well, my girl is a red bird today, what is yours?" or a bluebird, if I was wearing the blue dress."

Ethel was fifteen in 1906, so was very concerned with how she looked before the trip.

"Mother would be insisting that sister put on a sweater as she was never dressed warm enough. She would say; "Button up your coat, and tie that fascinator closer around your neck." A fascinator was a long wide scarf very soft and warm. Sister had worked on her hair all morning and did not want to spoil it."

Leaving the house was not as easy as checking our programmable thermostats (ok, who even bothers with that??). One had to plan ahead, as they knew they would be very cold by the time they got back home:

"Dad or mother would bank the fire in the cook stove so that all we had to do when we got home was just stir it up, and with some corn cobs and a dash of kerosene the fire would be going in short order. No one was allowed to use kerosene except mother and dad."

To be continued...

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