

WILLIAM WALLACE, HIS LIFE STORY

Haskell County, Kansas

Written by Eva Mae Cooper

Told by William Wesley Wallace

William Wesley Wallace was born on October 27, 1876, in Atlantic, Cass County, Iowa. He and his folks moved to Harper County, Kansas in 1884. Mr. Wallace explained, *“We arrived on the train, so of course, we didn’t have a hard time getting here, no hard luck except running out of cash.”* Two years later, on April 17, 1886, they moved to their claim over by Old Santa Fe, Haskell County, Kansas. *“We had oxen and horses hitched to our covered wagon. It took us two weeks to get here, and we experienced many, many hard rains. That was all the trouble we had, but it was very tiresome. When first arriving, we had to live in a tent until we could do better. A month later, we moved into an old sod house, built about 2 feet in the ground and the rest above the ground. The roof was covered with tarpaper and then sod was put on top of that. The worst houses built today are better than what we had to live in back then.”*

When Mr. Wallace was not working in the field, he would go hunting. He spent much of his time making snares to catch the little ground squirrels, noted for in Kansas. He also enjoyed catching prairie dogs and owls.

They went through some terrible blizzards. The winters were so cold and snow was so thick that it was impossible to get to town. Mr. Wallace stated, *“Young people today do not know what cold weather is and do not know real snowstorms. We have experienced snowstorms that were so bad we were shut in for a week at a time.”*

After they had been there for only about six months, they experienced one of those snowstorms. You could see frozen cattle laying on the grounds of the prairie and hungry rabbits would go to the barns for food. They had many experiences with the Buffalo and the wild horses. When they saw the animals, they were always in large herds. The horses were so wild, that getting close to them was impossible. The Antelope provided them with meat most of the time.

Mr. Wallace helped others in catching some of the rabbits. They would skin them and remove the internal organs. They would then ground them in a food grinder with some pork. Then they made some cloth sacks and stuffed them with the ground meat. They hung the sacks outside so the meat would freeze. It made a very delicious meal.

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Mr. Wallace saw several prairie fires and helped in getting them under control. He also experienced times when the grasshoppers were so bad that they would eat the handles off the hoes and pitchforks. They would have to put blankets on the horses to protect them. The flying ants were so bad that it was hard to keep them off the wagon drivers and the teams.

They had a difficult time getting clothing. For a long time, clothing came from other places. They eventually made their own clothes. It was mostly overalls, jumpers, and jackets made out of the canvas used on their wagons and tents. They were not very comfortable to wear, but they served the purpose and wore well.

When they first arrived there, there were not any wells, and that was quite a problem. They had to haul their water from Ivanhoe, which was ten miles away. That was not an easy job. Sometimes they would run out of water, and it would be a few days before they could get any. Sometimes they would line up, taking turns to get water. Mr. Wallace remembers, *"I had to stand in line many hours at a time to get enough water to last our family a couple of days. In 1887, some people dug a well by hand close to us. It was dug two hundred feet deep, and it was curbed with lumber."*

The family lived ten miles southwest of Ivanhoe, and it had a population of about one thousand. Haskell County was then part of Finney County. Soon after the county was organized, a permanent county seat was needed and there were two contenders for the honor, Santa Fe and Ivanhoe. Of course, there was quite a dispute over that, and a meeting of both towns was held at Ivanhoe. Some of the "tough men" from Dodge City were there to handle it. Bob Motson, one of the well-known gunmen, was there. Mr. Wallace said, *"We had quite a hilarious time, and although spirits ran high, there was no record of any disturbance."* The election was held on October 13, 1887. The people of Santa Fe feared they would lose. When the votes were counted, Santa Fe had 647, and Ivanhoe had 381. There was no chance for a contest there, so the county seat troubles were dropped.

Mr. Wallace stated, *"By this time, we had moved five miles west of Santa Fe, and we lived there four years. It was also a sod house, very poorly made. Then we moved into Santa Fe and lived there for ten or twelve years because the city was growing, and about two thousand people were living there by then. It was a third-class city and was organized on January 2, 1888."* It was about that time that the family started constructing a new adobe home and it ended up as a large four-room structure with a shingle roof.

The freight was hauled from Garden City, which was a distance of twenty-eight miles. Mr. Wallace made a good many trips with his team of oxen, hauling freight there. It usually took thirty-six hours to make the trip. The grocery man usually gave them things to eat to pay for delivering their goods, and that was one way they could help

make their living. When they ran short of money, which was often, they could always depend on that.

Santa Fe's prosperity, if it could be called that, was of brief duration. The town failed instead of prospering. The prairie fires destroyed many houses and livestock, and some people were mean enough to set fire to the grass. Sometimes it caught fire from the sun shining on a tin can on a hot scorching day. The fires usually came from the southwest and were almost always at night. They would light up the skies. They traveled very fast, and sometimes you hardly had time to save your belongings. Sometimes they would start a fire and let it burn back towards the original fire. They would also plow around their buildings if they could. Mr. Wallace stated, "*If we got caught in or near a fire, we would hunt an area where we could lie down and let it pass over us. It was pretty hot while it was going over, and we could hardly stand it. There was also a deep hole that had once been a dugout and we usually tried to get to it before the fire reached us. The smoke would roll down in, and almost choke us to death. Sometimes the fire would get close enough to our horses that it would catch their collars on fire. At times they would die from the burns.*"

The land was very cheap back then, and if you had any money at all, it was usually spent on buying land. Mr. Wallace raised pretty good crops. The yield was pretty good, and times began to get better. There was wheat to be hauled away, so the subject of a railroad came into discussion. The railroad was finely built but missed Santa Fe by five miles. So the town of Sublette was started, and everything in Santa Fe was moved there.

Mr. Wallace moved to Sublette in November of 1927. After his parents passed away, he and his sister, Miss May Wallace,* owned their own home together. Neither one ever married. They did keep their nephew for a while. Mr. Wallace had several goats. He sold some of them, and would also sell goat milk to several people. He also had a few pigeons.

Mr. Wallace described a cyclone (*tornado*) that he saw one time. It lifted a farmhouse nearby from its foundation, turned it around, and replaced it on the foundation. There was quite a lot of damage done, but the cyclone did not destroy any of the Wallace property.

The old adobe building was sold to a farmer, who took the walls and roof to make a windbreak. It was to protect some of his land plus hold off some of the Kansas hot winds, dirt, and snow.

Mr. Wallace was elected County Treasurer and he held the office for two terms. He also kept an office in the Welfare Department at the courthouse for some time.

**Additional information
WILLIAM W. WALLACE**

WILLIAM WESLEY WALLACE, son of George S. Wallace (1848-1932) and Elvira Smith Brouse (1849-1921) was born on 27 Oct 1876 in Atlantic, Cass County, Iowa. His parents moved the family to Biggsville, Henderson County, Illinois before moving on to Harper County, Kansas in about 1884. They stayed in Harper County for only a short time before moving on to Haskell County, Kansas in about 1886.

In 1895, the family was living in Dudley Township, Haskell County, Kansas. By 1920, William was still living with his parents and they had moved to Haskell Township, in Haskell County. William never married. He had five siblings and they were George Jr., Ralph, Earl, Mattie, and May Florence. In 1930, with both parents deceased, William and his sister, May Florence, who did not marry, owned a house together in Sublette, Haskell County, Kansas. William was 53 years old at that time. He was the County Treasurer for Haskell County, Kansas and in 1940; he was a Government worker, working as a Commodity Clerk.

Records reveal William was 6 feet tall with brown hair and blue eyes. William passed away in 1942 and buried at the Dudley Township Cemetery in Satanta, Haskell County, Kansas.

**MAY FLORENCE WALLACE
(Sister of William W. Wallace)**

MAY FLORENCE WALLACE, was born on 25 May 1878 in Atlantic, Cass County, Iowa. Like her brother, William Wallace, May did not marry. She passed away, due to a heart ailment, on 14 Apr 1956 and buried at the Dudley Township Cemetery in Satanta, Kansas.

Cemetery Headstones



**DUDLEY TOWNSHIP CEMETERY
Satanta, Kansas**

Headstone photographs provided by Leon Barton