

Whitman, Merton J. ; Collection

Memoirs
1946

FOLDER 1
BOX
COLLECTION C. 398

NO. OF ITEMS IN FOLDER: 13

DATE COUNTED: 2000-06-14

STAFF PERSON: AS

^{Beginning}
I was born in Springport
twof Jackson Co. in a log
house not over 40 rods from
where the famous Foster murder
case was committed on Jan 1
1866. My first memory of
any thing was at the age of
two Father built the barn on
that place in 1868 and I
can remember (remember) Mother
taking me in her arm and
going out to the barn & Father
and Mr. Collier were up in
the frame of the barn just as
well as though it was yesterday
My next recollection was going
to school started at the age
of three went to school to my
Sister Ell. I remember her
standing me on the stove to
punish & Sam Cooper going
through school yard and

shaming me as the door was open. I remember that I finished the primer & went in to the first reader and that I was asleep in my seat when father brought the reader to school & Ell came and woke me up. I do not remember much about the school when I was four but remember I went to school and then remember that Ell taught the Center school & that I went up to Uncle Hiram Champlin & was going to stay a week & visit Ell school and before the week was over got the Ague & that Will came after me & took me home on horse back. At the age of 5 yrs commenced to husk corn and have been husking corn ever since I went to school summer

clothes enough so I will not be ashamed of myself and of course will have to have a certain amount of Booze. I have never worried about myself but have always planned from one year and the other & now as I am about to quit it I think of these things. I told Arthur Haite at Leslie Champlin funeral that if I did not have a dollar in the world that my children would not let me want. Bella as I sit around doing nothing my mind goes back over the past over & over again & to pass away a little time am going to write you a little sketch of my life & when I write to Leslie again will take some other subject

could cut it we used to cut
and put in the shock three
acres a day how done it I
don't know but I know we did
we used to have a lunch in the
fore noon & one in the afternoon
& work until sun down &
commence at seven o'clock in
the morning At the age of 16
Father sold all but 40 acres
and we went up on to the
Ogemaw to plains I had
never been out of Jackson
Calhoun Eaton and Ingham
County & had never rode
on the cars but once & that
was when I was a baby and
knew nothing about it had
no idea what we were going
into at that time it was
very new north of Bay City
the first time I saw the river

and winter until I was nine
years old but would often have
to go home at the after noon
recess and drive the horses on
the horse power as Father had a
sixer mill & drove the horses
on horse power many a sale
& saw wood. At nine I
commence to plow I remember
it as it was the 1st Monday in
Sept of that year and in
those days school meeting
was held on that day & it was
the first time I ever went to
school meeting & Father & Mill
told the folks that I had
plowed one acre that afternoon
and have been plowing every
since with the exception of
the past two or three years.
At the age of 15 I rake & bound
the grain as fast as Father

To house the stock, well when
we land there it was midnight
and a treader by you never saw
I lay down in one corner of
the room as soon as I got
something eat and went
to sleep & in fixing the beds
up as we could all sleep they
moved into an other corner
of the house & when I woke
up did not know where I
was till I went out of door
the sun was was in the
wrong direction Jack Pines
& scrub Oak in every direction
and in the distance a big
pine forest the pine in
the distance was a beautiful
sight wish you could of seen
it but the Jack Pine did not
like well in a few day we
got days we got a small piece

in Bay City it was just as
full of saw logs as it could
be and lumber piled up in every
direction and the streets the
most of them were made of
saw dust from there north
as we looked out of the car
was just a little log house
here & there with a small
clearing around. Meat Branch
was just a small hole in
the woods, & we went out
nine miles from there and
rocks only to the road, & not
a house in the whole distance
& one lumber camp some of
the distance was lumber
skidding & some was heavy
timber Father had been up
there before we went and built
a house I think about 16x20
and built a board stable

at the age of 18 but at that
I had the best education of
any man in the Heland
settlement & in some studies
was better than your mother
but she knew many studies
that I knew nothing about
well from the time I was
18 until I was 21 worked
winters in the woods &
cleared the plains land we
had about 100 acres cleared
at that time. Then the
winter that I was 21 Father
sold the last forty acres that
he had in Springport I
was always supposed to
have a horse or \$100~ when
I was 21 as Mill had a
colt and a couple of calves
& the girls & all had a cow
well Father said to me a

of ground cleared & Father
started to plow I was
home sick from the beginning
but when saw the soil
turned over I said not so
right out that land is not
good for any thing & Father
said yes that is good land
aint it I lick that was
Uncle Jay Cortright he went
up & worked for us that
summer but I worked that
whole summer as home sick
as any one could be. That
winter I went back to
Springport to school & that
was the last of my schooling
my folk would of sent me
to West Branch to school
but did no any body there
and was to times to go so went
to work in the cedar swamp

a few day after I was 21
Mest what are you agoing to
do with your \$100 I said I
did not know. Well he said
I would like to use it & if
you want it any time I will
get it for you He had several
hundred dollars in the
bank in West Branch at that
time Well I went in the
house & hawled about it but
that was as near as I ever
got my hundred dollars &
I thought that I was just as
sure of that hundred dollars
as I was of my dinner but he
put in into buildings on
the plains and once in there
was hard to get. Well Gella this
is a bigger task than I thought
and if it interest you say so
and will finish it at some other time

Good Bye

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Hearborn Feb 12-45
Geneva 2245

Dear Elsie

Will try and answer your letter that I received a week ago last Sat Gil has just left to take the bus for home will arrive about six P.M. He is looking fine Elsie as there is not much to write about around here that will interest you think I will write you a little story He will call it my life on the Plains will commence it by describing our moving from Springfield at that time had not been only in four County had never road on the car only once & that was when I was a baby & did not know anything

in the middle of the afternoon
we saw the freight train
coming & had to hustle like the
dickens to get the stuff in and
had just time to get in to the
freight cars as the engine hitch
on to us Day & Bright got into
the car where the cattle were
and I in the car with the
horses we knew that when we
got to River Junction that we
would be switched on to a
side track & that a train would
come from Jackson and hitch
on to us to take us north (River
Junction was about ten miles
south of Eaton Rapids) when
they switched on to the siding
we thought we had a quite
a bit of time. We got out of
the cars and was looking
around for a place to find
some water for the stock and

about it my Father took three
freight car load consisting of
four horses four cows & a bull
three or four hogs & a bunch of
chickens hay & grain household
goods & farm tools he ^{had} one thing
that you never saw that we
took with us & that was a
horse power that they used those
days to cut wood with and
thresh they used 10 horses on
these horse powers. All of this
stuff had to be hauled to Eaton
Rapids to be loaded on to the
cars. I was all enthused up
as I thought we were going
to get rich. After we got every
thing hauled to Eaton Rapids
Father order three cars and four
of us worked just as fast as
we could to load the cars
as the freight train came in

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woke up in the morning we
were right beside of the Saginaw
river in Bay City and the river
was just as full of pine saw
logs as could be was a great
sight to me as I had never seen
a pine saw log before and every
where that one could see the
streets they were built of
saw dust and lumber piles
as far as one could see, Father
& Mother and my sister Bell
& Brothers Slim & Gord went
on ahead of us by passenger
train & they stopped at a station
called Welch it was the first
station south of West Branch
there was no depot there it was
just a signal station if
you wanted the train to stop
one would blow a signal and
if one wanted to get off there he

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look up and ~~it~~ saw the
freight train coming from
Jackson we had to scramble
again to get in to their car
again. It did not go far before
it was dark and we were both
in closed box cars with no
lights in them after we had
pass through four or five trains
Dag got out of his car and got
in with me. We hunted around
and finally found the lantern
that was in my car then we
had some light we broke open
a bale of hay and made up
a place for ourselves to lay down
we stayed in that car until we
got to Bay City we went to sleep
while the switch engine was
bumping us around in Bay
City to make up the train to
to go further north when we

had built we had to cross
two creeks - to get on to the plains
and one way he said that the
bridges were afloat & said we
would have to go the longer route
to get there I was so tired by
this time that I could hardly
wriggle. Will & Day drove the
saddle & father & I drove the team -
it was woods & nothing but woods
and no road but a dirt road that
wrote around among the
stumps & trees and I had not
even ever heard of such a place
when we arrived at the house I
was tired & hungry as soon
as I got something eat crawled
into one corner of the room and
went to sleep the house was
just one big room & all they
could do was to make up some
beds on the floor when they

he would tell the brakemen &
they would stop the train and
let you off The freight train
left Bay City about nine o'clock
in the morning and we arrived
at Welch Station about three
or four o'clock in the afternoon
in order to unload the horses
and cattle we had build up some
thing to unload them as there
was no permanent ~~one~~ unloading
place. He took some Telegraph
poles & then lashed rail road
ties on to the them & make
an unloading ^{place} by the time
we got the stock unloaded and
the wagon unloaded and put
together it was dark but it was
a bright moon light night my
Brother Will was there to help
us he had moved on to the ^{father}
plains & lived in a house that

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way. It snowed during the day
but we thought the bridges
would be all right and went
back the same way got over
the first bridge all right. (these
bridges were covered with logs
as all other bridges were covered
on this tote road) but when we
came to the next bridge it
was afloat & there was no
other way only to go across as
we could not turn back well
the first team went through
the bridge both horses had every
leg through and the water was
so deep that their feet did not
touch the bottom of the creek
there they lay with their bellies
across those logs & could not
struggle a bit as they had no
foot hold I was all most
cared to death but it did not

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got the beds made up they moved
~~me~~ into an other corner of the house
and I never knew it until the
next morning when I woke up.
I went out of doors & there was
scrub oak and jack pine as
far as one could see In the
distance was a large track of
white pine looked like a large
cloud coming up, that was
a beautiful sight there was also
a small tract of pine ~~one~~ to
the south & one in the north
west. The next day we went
over to the rail road station
to unload the ^{cars} load & to get
the freight car empty as we
would not have to pay for
the use of the car standing
on the track. it froze the
night before & the water went
down so we went over the short

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but I was afraid of the
lumber jacks and would not
go. (I had heard all of my life
what a tough bunch of men
that the lumber jacks were and
was afraid of them for a long
time but learned afterwards that
when they were in the wood that
they were a fine bunch of men
it was just when they got to
town and got full of whiskey
that they were ruff & then only
a part of them) Father went and
a got the chain the camp was
about a mile away. we hitch
the chain to the end of the
tongue and drew the wagon
across then weighted the logs
on this bridge down the best
we could and came across
with the other load all right
it took us several days to haul

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worry Father one bit. Shall we
unhitch the tugs and get every
thing loose from the wagon
and spoke to the horse and
they came out of it I can not
see to this day how they ever
got out. By this time it was
dark and I was so darn
home sick that I could not
do a thing only to shoot off
my mouth it hurt I said but
I could not help it well as
I have said the horses came
out all right but the wagon
was on one side of the bridge
and the horses on the other
and another team & load
to come across & we had no
chain with us but there was
a lumber camp about a mile
away & Father wanted me to go
to the camp and get a log chain

tumber West Branch was just a hole in the wood popel on one side & heavy tumber on the other they had a pretty good road in the town and they were doing a big business but it was all supplying the lumber men. I remember one time that I was out to West Branch and counted 21 Jote team. loaded with supplies going out to the camps. There was no school within nine miles of us that first summer & Bell & Shrin had no chance to go to school that summer. Ford was too young to go to school. Father got a school district organized that summer. They thought at first that they could not organize a school as there was no one but Father & Bill to hold the

the stuff home as the roads were so poor and all of the way with the exceptions of about one half mile & that was through a swamp and that was crossing it ^{was} through this swamp one day that I saw my first deer in the woods and it was a big sight to me. After we got the stuff all hauled Father sent Day & I to West Branch after a couple of loads of lumber to build fence if they made a lot of fence those days out of lumber it was my first trip to West Branch it was nine miles to the Branch and a Jote road right in to the town there was not a house in the whole distance part of the way & it was a pine slashing and a part of the way heavy

we hauled manure from the camp to put on the garden & potatoe patch the Oats what there was of them we cut with the cradle but the oats were so drenched short that we could not bind them with the straw so we cut willows to tie them up. Day & I spent our Sunday roving around the Plains & woods to see what we could find had not been there long before we found a quite a large lake surrounded by large Norway pine when we first saw that lake there was the largest flock of wild ducks that I ever saw in my life but there was no boat on the lake & the ducks did not come near enough so we could shoot them Day had a muggie loading Rifle and I had

The school Office ¹⁴ some of the Officials asked Father if his wife did not have a sewing machine & he told them that she did as Father Mother & Mill were the school Officers and Father built a small building think it was about 12 x 16 it just was sheeked up inside and out & then the side walls were shingled and my Sister Kate taught the first school on the Plains there was a family that moved in to one of the camps about one and a half miles away that had three children that they sent to school so Kate had the first children to teach that winter. We cleared about forty acres that first summer the only crop that was good for any thing was the garden & potatoes

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an old army musket that every
time I shot it it would kick
me into the middle of next week
Day got a deer that day the
first one that he had ever
saw in the woods this was
in April 1882 & after we dressed
it out were sorry that he killed it
as she would of had a pair of
fawns. We carried the doe home
about two miles. In a few days
we built a boat and put on that
lake one side of the lake was
shallow water just like the
beach on Saginaw bay and the
whole lake was very clear you
could see the bottom in twenty
feet of water all of fish in
that lake were perch & quite
small it was nothing to catch
100 at a time and we had