

UNCLE LEVI

by Earle R. Hubbard

Levi, son of Solomon and Serepta Hubbard, was born at Sweeden, New York, June 15th 1829, moving to York, Ohio, in 1831 and to Lyn-



**Levi Hubbard — Woodsman,
Plainsman, Miner, Packer
and Rancher**

don, Illinois in 1839, where he grew up on his fathers farm. The fall of 1846, he was obliged to leave home to earn money to help pay off the mortgage on his parent's farm. Going to Fulton, he got a job with a Lumber Company that was going to establish a camp on the Kettle River, away north of Fort Snelling in Minnesota. So he fell in with the crew and went up the Mississippi to the mouth of the St. Croix, then up that to the mouth of the Kettle River, where they had to cut a trail through the timber to their camp site.

They used all oxen to do their snaking, hauling and skidding, they had to tote hay and grain a long distance. Snow came soon after they got the log buildings up and it was a very cold winter. They were obliged to dress very heavy as they were in the woods ready to work at the peep of day and kept at it until they would go to camp after dark. The camp had three log buildings, big shed for the oxen, cook and eating shack combined with fireplace and bunk shack with fireplace at one end with a plank bench, called "The Deacon Seat", long enough to seat the whole crew in front of the fire, then behind that came two tier of bunks against the wall.

The boss would let men who could handle oxen, take turns at toting in feed and supplies, sending two men and two teams at a time. During a round trip they would be obliged to camp out several nights. On one trip that Levi and another man made, they tied the oxen to one sled and after they had cooked their supper, built a good sized fire near the other sled which had a flat rack on it, cut boughs and made their beds on them so that their feet were toward the fire and their heads were under the rack. It snowed a little and the fire died down toward morning and when they got up, they saw the tracks of a Canadian Lynx that had walked along the edge of the rack right over their heads.

During the winter the logs were skidded down on the ice of the river and branded, then when the ice went out the logs mostly went with it, but there would be some get lodged along the banks, that would have to be poked out and sent on, this was called the "Log Drive", with every man armed with a pike pole. Not a day went by without each man getting wet all over in ice cold water at least half a dozen times. At times the logs would jam and it might take hours, sometimes with every man out on the jam, trying to find the key log and loosen it with his pike pole, then when the jam did break, it was every man run for his life. They had to drive the logs in this fashion until they got below the St. Croix Falls, then build booms to catch the logs.

Then each company cut out their logs and built them into rafts. After the rafts were built and started, the men had it easy and a lot of fun, they always tied up at night by using their sweep oars to guide the raft to one side of the stream, out of the current for a while until the raft lost some of it's headway, then taking the hawser to shore in a row boat and making one end fast to a tree or rock, then wrapping the other end around a snubbing post on the raft. Then several men grabbed the hawser and eased it around the post while one man used a pail to throw water on the post to keep the hawser from burning. One time when they were unable to stop the raft, the men were forced to let go of the hawser, the end of it whirling around the post struck one of the crew, knocking him overboard and he was drowned.

The logs were rafted to St. Louis, but Levi got put ashore at Fulton, Ill., then going home. He worked at farming all summer. The next fall he took on the job with the same Lumber Company, and either they got a later start or else cold weather came on sooner, anyhow, when they got to the lower end of Lake Pepin, they found it frozen and impossible to get farther with the boat.

So sixteen of the men started to walk without a gun or blankets. Travel was very slow as the ice was too slick and the banks too rough and covered with brush, no sign of habitation, so they slept by a fire in the brush. They kept on like this without a bite of grub since they had left the boat until the night of the third, when they came to a log store run by an old man and his wife. They saw what shape the men were in and told them to wait a bit and they would make soup for them, but they grabbed every thing that they could eat. The old folks pleaded with them not too and told them they would kill themselves, but they could not stop them. Three of the men died before morning and the rest were terrible sick. The river was still open above the lake so as soon as the men were able to travel, they took a boat to the mouth of the Kettle River, then on foot to their old camp of the winter before. The men who had gone up a few weeks earlier had the camp slicked up and were all busy. Some of the same men were there again and every thing worked the same.

When Levi's turn came to go out with the tote team, they had got their loads and were making camp, on their second night of the return trip when they heard Indians yelling and singing, possibly a mile to the west, as it got dark they could see their fires and the drums and racket got louder. The men got their supper and went to bed as usual, but did not sleep very sound. Their fire was still burning bright, when an Indian came to their camp, a talking and crying. They jumped up to see what ailed him and made out that the Indians had got a large quan-

tity of whiskey and were drunk and fighting, they had thrown him in the fire, as he showed some pretty bad burns. They made out that the squaws had hid all the guns and knives but the Bucks were playing pretty rough anyhow. They handed him a blanket and he bedded down but kept them awake by groaning and crying. Finally they went to sleep and when they awoke it was daylight and both Indian and blanket were gone.

The winters logging, the spring drive and the raft trip were just a repetition of the year before, even to quitting the raft at Fulton. He stuck to farming from then on and never went to the Minnesota woods again.

The spring of 1850, he got an urge to go to California, but Dad talked him out of it, and soon after that he fell in love with a neighbor girl and planned to get married and rent a farm there. So he worked with that in mind and early in the spring of 1852, he had a farm rented, oxen, wagon, farm implements and cash enough to run him a year, then about a week before they were to be married, she went to a dance with another guy. When he found out about it he told her that he was done. It just about killed her, she tried her best to straighten the deal out, but no dice.

He turned the lease over to another party, sold everything but the wagon and two yoke of oxen, got another guy to go with him and headed for St. Joseph, Mo. Got there in time to join a party ready to hit the trail for California. He took the same route that Dad took two years before and had about the same experiences, only the Indians were worse, many times they would have to corral the wagons in the day time and have a little scrap with them and nights they always corraled the wagons and put all stock in the enclosure, then stood guard. They had it understood that no guard should shoot at night, unless he was sure it was an Indian. Levi had seen some white wolves at a distance and was curious to get a close up of one, so it happened that one night as he was on guard he saw one sneaking around camp, so he took a shot at him. In an instant every man was out of his blanket with gun ready. Levi told them to keep low, that an Indian was crawling along in a white blanket and he thought he had hit him but that they better not go out there, for if he was just wounded he would fill them full of arrows. The next morning they had a good look at a white or buffalo wolf.

They trained every man to jump on a running horse either alone or behind another rider and to grab a horse's tail and hang on at full speed. In one stretch of country they were bothered with Indians, that were supposed to be friendly and knowing how afraid they were of smallpox, there was a man in the outfit that was terribly pitted, so they got him to lay in the back of a wagon for some time till he got up a good sweat and his face was red as fire, then they told some Indians, "come see sick man," and took them to the back of the wagon and turned back the covers. He rolled up his eyes and they yelled and ran, there was not another Indian showed up for two hundred miles.

When finally arriving at the diggings, he joined Dad and was one of the nine man crew that I have the picture of, taken late in 1852. I have told of his activities with Dad except for the time that he worked as pit sawer in a mill that sawed out planks for the construction of

flumes. In those saw mills the logs were skidded on rollers over a pit, where one man stood and another man, called 'Top Sawyer' stood on a platform over the pit, with the log between them. They used a large saw to cut the logs into planks. It was hard to get pit sawers and they had to pay higher wages. Lumber sawed this way was called, 'Whipsawed'.



Ralph A. Hubbard and Earle R. Hubbard at the Hubbard Museum. (1956)

After quitting Dad and going to Oregon, he worked for a while on a cattle ranch in the Rogue River valley. Then went on north, and worked on a ranch on the John Day River. Then going to the Dalles of the Columbia, he got a job with a mule pack train bound for Barmack City over in Montana Territory. He stayed with this outfit until he was able to buy a cayuse train and took on cargoes at the Dalles and Umatilla landing for Anaconda, Deer Lodge and The Butte as they called it at that time. He soon sold the cayuse string and bought mules, then packed for years, it was a hard life and very dangerous but he liked it better than mining or punching cows. There were six men with a train of thirty or forty mules, they would get up and get their breakfast overwith before daylight and load by tying each mule to a rope stretched about four feet above the ground, every mule was tied with hackamore at the same place each time and his pack was placed in front of him on the other side of the rope so each mule wore the same saddle and same pack each day. They were each packed by two men, who first blindfolded the mule by using a Mexican invention called a 'Tepojo' (ta-po-ho), which was a combination of quirt and blindfold, that each packer carried all the time.

The mules were never packed but once a day, as soon as possible after daylight they were trailed out by one man leading the bell mare, which was always white or very light grey, for the reason that men and mules could see her better in the night. Then after two P. M.

(depending on water) the rope stretched up and each mule tied, blind-folded and unpacked, the bell mare hobbled, the mules turned loose with theodores tied up around their necks.

Most of the men rode mules but there were always a few fast horses that were kept on picket ropes near camp. The men took turns as guards or nighthawks every night as thieves, both red and white, were liable to stampede the mules or catch the bell mare then muffle the bell and sneak them away.

One time as they were passing through Nezperce country, on the trail that they had traveled many times, they came to a small stream and there was Chief Joseph and a bunch of his head men, they demanded toll to cross the stream, which they had always crossed for free. They had quite a pow-wow, Levi and the others had their rifles across their saddles in front of them. Levi edged his horse around until it was about right, then cocked the rifle intending to shoot the Chief. The man next to him noticed the maneuver and heard the cocking of the rifle and said, "For Gods sake don't shoot him or we will all be killed," so he thought better of it, paid the toll and went on.

The most danger was from Road Agents on the return trip after selling the cargo and having all that gold with them. Many trains were held up and robbed. Levi never tried to take the gold out with the train. He would slip out of their camp (which was made a little apart from the others) during the night on his best horse armed with rifle and two colt dragoon revolvers, the rifle in boot under his right stirrup strap (he was left handed), one revolver in his belt holster, the other in the left side of the cantanas and the gold on the other side.

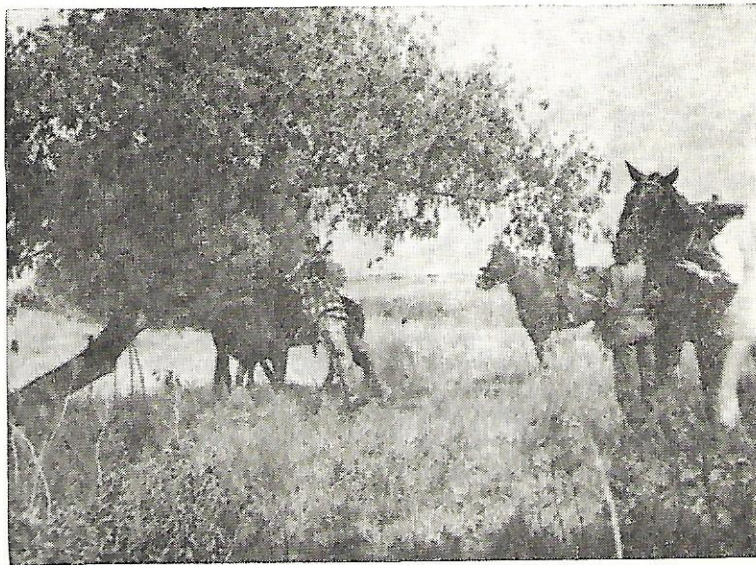
They all rode the heavy Mexican Machero saddle which was single rigged, large flat topped horn, low sloping cantle, stirrups fitted with large tapadaras and the machere came down low enough so fenders were not used. These saddles had narrow forks and the cantanas was made quite a bit on the same principal of the saddle bags of today but much closer together. Between the two there was an opening that set down over the horn, then the lower ends were tied down near the front corners of the machero. Levi and most of the old timers liked them much better than saddle bags as the weight was on the horses shoulders instead of over the kidneys.

More than once after Levi slipped out ahead with the gold, his train was held up on the trail and searched, but finding no gold were let to go on their way. After the discovery and big stampede to Alder Gulch, the town of Virginia or Virginia City sprang up almost over night, Levi headed his pack train for there, taking the same trail until he crossed the Bitter Root Mountains, through the Lolo Pass, then going south up th Bitter Root Valley, then through the Gibbons Pass across the Rockies to Bannack and on to Virginia City.

Soon after he started packing to Virginia City, he tried to make a trip too many one season, snow caught them in the Blue Mountains, south of Walla Walla. They were tied up for days and he was afraid he would lose the mules and possibly their own lives as they ran out of grub and lived on dried meat that they chopped off from a hind quarter of a mule that had died the summer before. Levi became snow blind for some time and one eye never got as good again. At last there came a little

thaw, then froze so they got out while the snow was crusted and were they glad to get down where there was grass and game.

By the time they reached Virginia City, every thing was shut down for the winter, so he turned the mules out and built a log store and sold the cargo from there. Long before Christmas, he had sold every thing edible and the whole camp was on meat straight and that was deer and elk meat. While he had anything left to eat he could get any price he would ask. The best and fastest saddle horse he ever owned, one that saved his life more than once, he got for a hundred pounds of flour. He sold a small barrel of salt pork to a man, who was married to a squaw. After paying for it, he said he would come back and get it later on. Soon he came back with the squaw and loaded the barrel on her back. Levi said, "That is a pretty big load for her". She must have understood for she said something and he turned to Levi and said, "She says she can pack it home with you on top of it". Levi was invited to a friend's home for Christmas dinner, they had nothing but elk meat but his wife cooked it three different ways, boiled, fried and roasted and it was a very enjoyable meal.



Hanging Earle R. Hubbard for the theft of a cow in 1949.

There were lots of very nice people in Virginia City, a lot of men from the States had brought their wives and families there. But about one third of the population of some fifteen hundred people were outlaws, that had been run out from the mines of California and all along the coast.

Henry Plummer was sheriff of Bannack, and the leader of the worst band of outlaws of any mining camp in the west until Virginia City came into being, then Plummer came there and told them to make him sheriff there also, which they were forced to do. He then appointed Jack Gallagher, Buck Stinson, and Ned Ray his deputies. They ran the miner's court, so that they could not convict anyone and it got so that

one didn't dare ask to have an outlaw arrested for fear of being ambushed. A citizen did not dare go out at night as people were held up and robbed every night and if they only had small sums on them, they were beat up and told if they ever came out again with so little on them that they would be killed.

It became so bad that five men of Virginia City and one of Nevada, got together and took steps to form a Vigilance Committee. In two days they had a large following, and at once sent out twenty-four picked men to arrest the known outlaws. At first they were brought into Virginia City in bunches as many as five and given a trial and hanged in the presence of as many as six thousand spectators, but this did not work so good. In one case two women caused the release of two murderers, and the condemned had more nerve and were not as apt to confess before a crowd and they seemed to think that the crowd would overpower the guards. The crowd sometimes threatened but never tried it. There would be as many as six hundred heavily armed guards around the prisoners, besides half that many mingling among the crowd with cocked revolvers.

To show the difference in the way that five men hanged at one time, took their medicine after being mounted on boxes or barrels: George Lane saw an acquaintance in the crowd said, "Good-bye, old fellow, I'm gone," and knowing that he would be the first to swing, didn't wait for the box to be knocked from under him, but jumped off. Jack Gallagher, while standing on the box used the most profane and dreadful language, he said he hoped that forked lightning would strike every one of the Committee, when the box was knocked from under him. Boone Helm looking coolly at his quivering form, said, "Kick away old fellow, I'll be in hell with you in a minute." He then shouted, "Every man for his principles, Hurrah for Jeff Davis! Let her rip;" as he lost his footing. Frank Parish just asked that a handkerchief be tied over his face.

Haze Lyons, one of the two men that the two women caused to be turned loose sometime before, being arrested now on another offense. The man who dug his grave, walked up to him while he was on the box and told him that he didn't get paid for digging his grave before but he would get his pay now. Lyons asked that the gold watch he was wearing, be delivered to his girl friend.

A few days later they arrested Sheriff Plummer and the other two deputies, tried and hanged them. Plummer weakened at the last, got on his knees with tears and sighs, declaring to God that he was too wicked to die. Ned Ray was run up with curses on his lips. Buck Stinson blubbered, "There goes poor Ned Ray," and down he went. After the last of the three dropped they heard groans and crying near and on going to investigate, they found a woman that was making the night hideous with her wailing, making her pipe down, she asked about Ned Ray, on being told that he was hung, she lit onto them with the worst string of oaths and abuse that a man ever heard a woman utter. One man got on each side of her and took her to her cabin and shoved her through the door. Upon Plummer's arrest, one of his gang forked a horse and rode the twelve miles to his ranch on the Madison River, to tell his wife. She at once grabbed a horse and got to town about a half hour after the hanging was over. She was grief stricken but being a fine lady, she did not bawl anyone out.

Levi saw all these hangings, but his first introduction to the "Vig-i-lan-tes" as he always called them, was one night soon after, when several men came in a wagon to his cabin and asked him to get in as a man wanted to see him. After getting in they blindfolded him and he thought they must have driven ten miles to a cabin and taking him inside pulled the blindfold off and there in the dim light sat a man in chains, that he had seen on the other side (west of the Rockies). They asked if he knew him, he told them that he did. They then asked what he knew about him, he told them that he did not know anything very good or very bad about him. They asked if he thought he would murder or rob? He told them that he didn't think he was smart enough or had sand enough for either one. Levi hadn't seen him for over a year, but somehow he knew that Levi was there so after his arrest, sent for him, thinking that he would speak a good word for him, but now he didn't think that he had done him much good so he started bawling him out, telling him, "You always called me Coy-o-te Evans and you did it for a slur." Then they blindfolded Levi and got in the wagon and drove back to Virginia City. The next day, just to satisfy his curiosity, Levi took a horse and rode all day, but could not find that cabin and never did find it.

In a day or so he joined the Vig-i-lan-tes, and they told him that Evans had stolen some little thing and they let him go, telling him to get out and stay out. Levi never saw him again. After Levi joined the Committee, he rode with them on some pretty long chases and helped arrest, try and hang quite a number of outlaws. From December 21st, 1863, till February 3rd, 1864, they captured, convicted and hanged twenty-two men. The reason that they worked so fast, was that they were continually dogged and threatened by the outlaws, so they had to get rid of the leaders for their own safety. After those twenty-two were hanged, a large number of their followers soon left and were never seen there again.

Levi told about a man by the name of J. X. Beidler (called just X by everyone), who came to Virginia City for the first rush and was there when he left the country. He was everyone's friend, outlaws as well as citizens, he never was robbed or mistreated. When an outlaw was hanged that had property, he would dispose of it and see that the right party got all the proceeds. When Haze Lyons was about to be hanged, he called out, "X I want you to come and stay with me till I die," which he did. Some executions were conducted by X and no letter in the alphabet struck as much terror on evil doers.

During the winter of 1863 and 1864, Levi went back in the hills to try and shoot an elk or deer. Quite late in the afternoon, at considerable distance he saw a mountain lion busy eating on something. He stepped up to a big tree, took a rest and pressed the trigger. The lion jumped in the air and lit running in his direction, he stood behind the tree and the lion ran by within a rod of him and kept right on. Going home he stopped at an old trappers shack and told the trapper about it. The trapper told him that he gave him his death shot and he was lucky that the lion didn't see him as he went by or he would have clawed him into ribbons. Then he wanted to know what Levi would take for the hide and he would go and find him the next morning. Levi told him that he was welcome to it, but he made him take a hunting knife, and the next time they met, he told Levi that he got him.

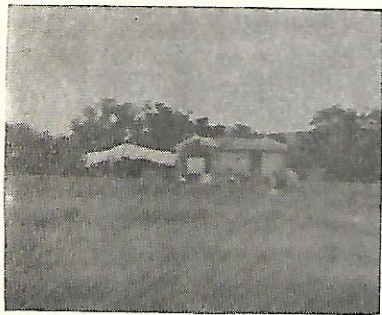
Early in the spring of 1864, Levi rounded up the mules and headed over to Umitilla Landing for a cargo he delivered at Virginia City, then going back to Umitilla he got a cargo that he delivered at the boom camp of Hel-e-na, there he sold the mule train, as freight was being hauled in wagons from Fort Benton and Salt Lake City.

Going back to Virginia City, he took to mining, and soon made the acquaintance of a school teacher from Beloit, Wisconsin, who that spring, in the company of her brother, had come up the Missouri River by steam boat to Fort Benton, then to Virginia City by stage coach. They were married the fall of 1864, at Virginia City, and lived there continuing to mine until the fall of 1866, when he took up land over in the Gallatin Valley not far from Bozeman.

After getting the log house enclosed, he let his helpers go, intending to finish it alone. The opening for the door was about in the middle of one side, there was no floor or windows in yet. But it got a little cold at night, so he built a fire on the ground at one end and brought his bed roll in and bedded down at the other with his colt dragoon under the covers and rifle on top. He had been asleep, but sensing something wrong, he looked to the door and there stood a mountain lion switching his tail. He would look first at him and then at the fire. Levi knew that wherever he was looking when shot, there he would jump, so when the lion looked at the fire Levi got the rifle ready and held still, then when the lion looked at him, then just as he looked at the fire, Levi unhitched on him, and with one jump the lion landed in the fire, kicking all over the room. Levi rushed to the door with drawn revolver and as soon as the lion stopped kicking, he had quite a time poking the fire back together again.

They soon moved over there, taking the saddle horses and buying cattle and work oxen. He had a close call while trying to buy oxen. He was in Bozeman at a public sale and seeing a man in the crowd whom he had heard had oxen for sale, walked up to him and just as he laid his hand on his shoulder to attract is attention, the man fell dead, shot through the heart by a stray bullet, fired by one of two men who were having a row at the other side of the crowd.

Levi started farming the spring of 1867, and by the fall of 1868, had good log buildings, quite a bit of land broke up that had produced two good crops, had 65 head of cattle, besides his work oxen and saddle horses. They were happy and contented in the best part of Montana, so he claimed.

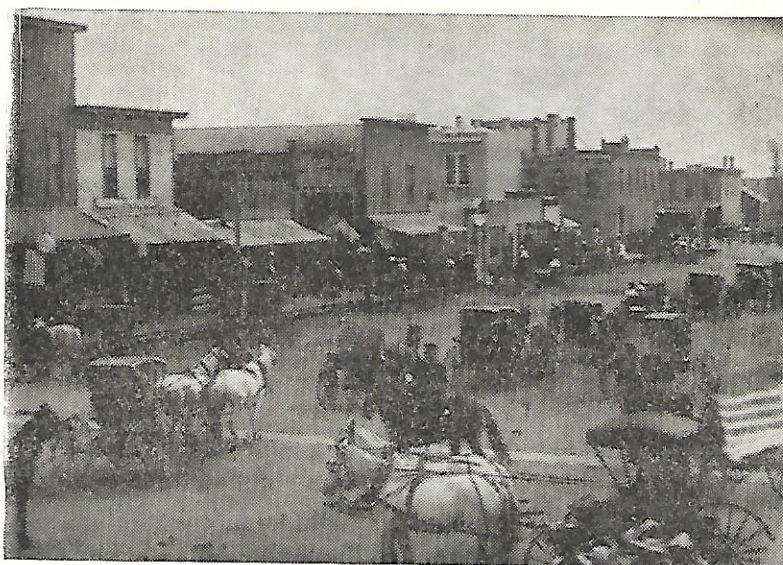


A Nester's Happy Home in the West.

His cattle, along with three of his neighbors stock were still ranging, just back in the hills, when the Crow Indians ran them off. They had been gone about two days when they were missed. Levi took his wife and little boy, bedding and provisions to a deserted mine shaft, that had been coyoted into a sidehill, where they stayed for three days and night, not knowing but he would be killed

and never come back to them. The other three men bunched their families all in one house.

The four men took out on the trail of the cattle and Indians, which they gained on quite rapidly as they were all well mounted. Levi was riding the horse that he traded the sack of flour for. The second day they got close enough so they began to find cattle that had started to lag and had been shot with what they thought were poisoned arrows. They kept gaining till they saw that there was a much larger band of Indians than they had expected to see and knowing the Indians had rifles at that time and thinking they would station rear guards along the trail that would pick them off, they decided that they were no match for that number. Of course, they each had a rifle and revolver, but they were muzzle loaders as they all were at that time. So they turned back and at that, a large number of Indians took after them. One, they took to be a Chief, rode a horse that was much larger and faster than the ordinary cayuse, they thought was an American horse brought from the States by emigrants and stolen by the Indians. This Indian got way ahead of the rest, just as they went down a steep hill at the edge of a valley of some width. Levi told the others to keep right on but he was going to stay at the foot of the hill. He dismounted, turned the horse sideways and running his arm through the reins, laid the rifle across the saddle. Soon the Indian rode near the edge of the hill, stopped and looked at the other white men away off yonder and Levi pressed the trigger. He thought that he must have drilled him dead center and as he fell, the horse whirled and cut back, the three men said they never saw a horse run so fast. As soon as Levi shot, he volted on his horse and soon overtook his companions and as far as they could see the other Indians were off their horses and bunched around their fallen Chief. They never offered to follow them any farther.



An Early Day Scene in the City of Clark

When Levi got home, he sold what little they had left and taking his wife and little boy, went by stage coach to Salt Lake City, then by train back to his old home at Lyndon, Illinois. He put in a bill to the Government, but never received a penny. He rented a farm near his Father and Mother for a while, then moved to Kansas, lived in a dugout and fought grasshoppers, then back to Illinois, until he made another start, then to western Iowa and bought a farm, and within a year or so their two boys got diphtheria and both died the same night. Then a few years later his wife died.

He then sold the farm and bought a half interest in a hardware store in South Omaha, Nebraska. He stayed by that a year or so, then



**Ralph A. Hubbard on Zipper
1941**

sold out and came here on December 26th, 1889 and farmed with Dad for two years. Then he went to Stanton, Nebraska, and farmed the season of 1892. In the spring of 1893, he took two teams and wagons and in company with another man started overland once more for the Pacific Coast. They went through west of the Black Hills, across the Custer Battle Field, through Bozeman, Montana, and over in eastern Washington, where they worked in harvest, then on west. When they got almost through they camped near a railroad and during the night the horses got on the track and were all killed by a train. They went on

and he got a job in a coal mine for the winter.

The spring of 1894, he came back here and lived with Dad and us at Raymond, South Dakota, until he died October 31st, 1899.

Earle R. Hubbard
Raymond, S. D.
April 19th, 1953.