



# Grandma and Me

Family Stories, Information,  
and Photos of the Crabtree  
and Higginson Families of  
Amanda Myrtie Crabtree Briggs

*Compiled and Edited by*  
**Louise Elizabeth Smith**





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Other books by Louise E. Smith: *Aida Austin's 1881 Diary*

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## About the Author



Louise Elizabeth (Austin) Smith was born in Fillmore, New York, and spent most of her growing up years on Peach Street in Southgate, Michigan, a Detroit suburb.

At nine, her mother taught her to embroider and sew. At ten, she loved reading biographies, and gave up on fiction writing after a failed attempt at a story about a bear. At eleven, she started playing the violin. In high school, she discovered her all-time favorite book, *Jane Eyre*.

College brought her a degree in music education. She worked on (and received) a Masters Degree in elementary education during her first several years of teaching. She taught for a total of ten years in Fenton, Michigan, where she met her husband (at last) in the

fall of 1978. Gary Smith and Louise Austin were married in December of that year.

The last 24 years have been spent moving across the country, raising four children, and dealing with a dog, parakeets, hamsters, guinea pigs, and chickens that somehow ended up being part of the household. Gary and Louise now live in Cave Creek, Arizona, where she currently enjoys counted cross stitching (although she doesn't do it very much), and reading (although she doesn't do that very much either), and is learning to make bobbin lace and rag rugs. She was fifty-five before she decided that nonfiction writing was more her style, and has worked on the Crabtree/Higginson family stories for three years.

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# Acknowledgments

In late summer 2004, armed with several pictures, nine pages of 30-year-old notes I had taken when I visited Grandma in Oregon, and some memories of stories Grandma and my mother had told me, I started to write a short narrative about my grandma, Amanda Myrtie Crabtree Briggs, her parents and grandparents, and the places they lived.

Over a year later, after meeting second, third, fourth, and fifth cousins through email; receiving and finding old photos, information, and answers to questions from those cousins as well as from my aunt and mother; calling or emailing for wills and death certificates; and of course, searching for hours on Google (What did I do before Google?)—the story of Grandma and her relatives is more complete and the book is longer than I had ever thought possible.

The text of Grandma's story, most of which is in Part I, is a combination of a short tape of Grandma talking about her life, two short handwritten stories by Grandma of her early life, and 15 typed pages of my grandma's whole life story. Special thanks to my mother, Mary Briggs Austin, for preserving this information and the many photos she also contributed.

A special Thank You, too, to Cal Bivens. Cal's Grandfather, LeRoy Crabtree, was a brother to my grandmother, Myrtie Crabtree Briggs. (Cal's family knew LeRoy and Myrtie's mother, Ida Emily Higginson Crabtree, as Emily.)

Combining the stories from both families has filled in a number of gaps in the timeline of the families of John L. Crabtree and Ida Higginson, our great grandparents.

Cal has been doing family research for some 30 years. He has shared his photos, documents, information, and research, including timelines, census reports from 1835–1930, and Civil War information, as well as answered multitudinous questions for this book, because he would like the family stories to be available to other family members.

Thank you does not adequately express my appreciation to all those that contributed photos, documents, research, information and/or answered my many questions. These include:

## **Austin/Briggs relatives:**

Mary Briggs Austin, my mom  
Mildred Briggs Lufburrow,  
Mom's sister, my aunt and  
major question answerer and  
contributor.

Clara Jean Briggs Whan wrote  
Briggs Heritage and gave  
me advice, information, and  
encouragement.

## **Crabb Cousins:**

Dan Brady  
Wendy Crabbe  
Duane Crabtree  
Jeannine McGee Nichols  
Lloyd Webber

## **Higginson Cousins:**

LaRetta Higginson Beard  
Raleigh Emry  
Mildred Amick Horton  
Dorlene Tolle Higginson  
Ron Horton  
Kathleen Higginson McCallister  
Zee Higginson Spanicek  
James Tracy

## **Crabtree and Higginson Cousins:**

Cal Bivens  
Hazel Crabtree Ramey

## **Friends, Family, and Relatives:**

A special thank you also to my family, many relatives, and friends who have been so very encouraging as I have written this book.

## **Gary Smith**

And to my husband Gary, who realized from the start the enormity of this project and still offered his expertise in laying out the book, creating the cover, and getting it ready to be published—THANK YOU!

## Dedication

*To Grandma Amanda Myrtie Crabtree Briggs, who preserved and told the stories of the Crabtree and Higginson Families; and to the Crabtree and Higginson Descendants who have made this book possible.*



*Grandma with an African Violet plant.*

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## Grandma and Me Introduction

Grandma “Go” Briggs, was our Austin Family’s affectionate name for Grandma—Amanda Myrtie Crabtree Briggs. Myrtie or Myrtle, as she was called after she was married, traveled by train and plane or car. As soon as someone mentioned going anywhere, Grandma had her purse and was ready to go. I think it was in her Crabtree blood.

After her husband Irwin Briggs, my grandpa, died in 1958, Grandma often spent several months at a time at our home and shared the bedroom with my two sisters and myself—four in one room at times—until I went off to college. I don’t remember Grandma ever complaining about the crowded conditions.

I do remember Grandma combing her long black hair. Her hair still had black in it well into her 80s. Some nights Grandma would wake up wheezing because of her asthma. I was afraid she wasn’t going to get her next breath, and was always relieved when the medicine in her atomizer started working.

Grandma was interested in healthy eating and was a fan of Adelle Davis who wrote, *Let’s Eat Right to Stay Fit*. I remember Grandma making bread. It took a long time for her to knead it and a long time for it to raise. The aroma and taste of fresh baked bread was well worth her trouble, in my opinion.

The oven, (due to lack of space), was where we stored our pans which had metal handles. One violin lesson day, I forgot the oven was pre-heating and grabbed

the pan handles. I burned the palm of my hand and knuckles. At Grandma suggestion, I put honey on my hand and wrapped it in a washcloth. By lesson time, my hand was fine.

Grandma loved pansies, a favorite flower of mine. When I see pansies, I think of Grandma. Grandma and her three daughters also loved African violets. Every time all four Briggs ladies were at our home, the cousins were dragged to the African violet greenhouse, where we impatiently waited until Grandma, our mom, and Aunts had seen each plant.

Grandma liked to buy products that advertised a moneyback guarantee. One time Grandma, about 80 years old, sent for a bottle of Oil of Olay lotion because the advertisement said it made women look 10 years younger, and also offered a money back guarantee. After a few days of using the lotion, Grandma did not think she looked any younger, so she packaged up the jar and sent it back. I don’t remember if she got her money back, but I bet she did.

Grandma knew every hymn and all the words to all the verses. Often in the evening, at 8:15, I think it was, she would go back to the girls’ bedroom, turn the radio on, sit on one of the three beds, and listen to J. Vernon McGee’s, *Through the Bible* series. J. Vernon was my favorite of the preachers she listened to on TV or radio.

The first summer I came home from college, I was on my feet all day, and very frustrated working at the lunch counter of a 5- and

10-cent-type store. About a week later, I got a call from a high school friend offering me a very welcomed desk job in an office situation. Grandma told me she had been praying for a new job for me.

While working on Grandma’s biography, I read that Grandma also had a job where she had to stand all day which she didn’t like—she understood my situation.

Some years Grandma lived in Oregon near her sister Mary. One summer in the mid-1970s, I spent a few weeks with Grandma who was living in an apartment there.

One of the things I did during that time was to write down some family stories Grandma told me of her growing up, of her parents and grandparents—the Crabtrees and the Higginsons.

Almost 30 years later, in the fall of 2004, I searched for and, amazingly, found my notes taken during that visit.

I was and have been fascinated by these stories, of relatives from Ireland and from New Brunswick, that homesteaded in the midwest, or fought and were wounded in the Civil War, or had a trading post in a wild new town in South Dakota, or that rode spotted ponies through the Indian sacred land—with permission. I especially remember Grandma telling about the moccasins the Indian lady in South Dakota made her. Grandma would never let us talk bad about the Indians.

I have written down these stories about Grandma, her parents and grandparents—real pioneers of the midwest.

*Happy reading. ❀*

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## Psalm 91

A favorite Psalm of Grandma

He that dwelleth in the secret place  
of the most High shall abide under  
the shadow of the Almighty.

I will say of the LORD, *He is* my  
refuge and my fortress: my God; in  
him will I trust.

Surely he shall deliver thee from the  
snare of the fowler, *and* from the  
noisome pestilence.

He shall cover thee with his feathers,  
and under his wings shalt thou  
trust: his truth shall be thy shield  
and buckler.

Thou shalt not be afraid for the  
terror by night; *nor* for the arrow  
*that* flieth by day;

*Nor* for the pestilence *that* walketh  
in darkness; *nor* for the destruction  
*that* wasteth at noonday.

A thousand shall fall at thy side, and  
ten thousand at thy right hand; *but*  
it shall not come nigh thee.

Only with thine eyes shalt thou  
behold and see the reward of  
the wicked.

Because thou hast made the LORD,  
*which is* my refuge, *even* the most  
High, thy habitation;

There shall no evil befall thee,  
neither shall any plague come nigh  
thy dwelling.

For he shall give his angels  
charge over thee, to keep thee in  
all thy ways.

They shall bear thee up in *their*  
hands, lest thou dash thy foot  
against a stone.

Thou shalt tread upon the lion  
and adder: the young lion and  
the dragon shalt thou trample  
under feet.

Because he hath set his love upon  
me, therefore will I deliver him: I  
will set him on high, because he  
hath known my name.

He shall call upon me, and I will  
answer him: I will be with him  
in trouble; I will deliver him, and  
honour him.

With long life will I satisfy him,  
and shew him my salvation.

---

## **Part I: Generation One**

### **Amanda Myrtie Crabtree**



*Amanda Myrtie Crabtree.*

#### **Nebraska Girls**

Oh, Nebraska girls, sweet Nebraska girls,  
With bright blue eyes and shining curls.

They sit and on the organ play,  
'Til some big dude comes in their way.  
They meet him at the parlor door,  
And fly with him forever more.

*—Song Grandma Myrtie sang*

---

## Chapter 1

# Amanda Myrtie Crabtree

Birth to Marriage, 1891–1919



Four year old Amanda Myrtie Crabtree.

*Amanda Myrtie Crabtree, the first child of John and Ida Higginson Crabtree, was my grandma. Here is her story in her own words:*

I was born in Nebraska on my father's homestead farm, November 17, 1891. They named me Amanda Myrtie. Our nearest town was Norden, a very small town. The doctor lived there. A little further away was Springview. It was a very small place, too, at that time.

The homestead was land from the government one could get at that time, 160 acres in Nebraska, on which you had to build a house and put out trees. The house was built of sod, like other homesteaders built theirs. The trees were cottonwood trees. They grow fast and can grow in the dry sandy places.

In the spring of that year, they tell me, my father had a fine crop of corn growing and my mother had a good garden with peas about ready to pick, when one of those terrible sandstorms struck—the wind blows so hard—and covered the cornfield and the garden—everything.

### **John, Ida and Myrtie move to Bonesteel, South Dakota**

When I was 6 months old, they moved to Bonesteel, South Dakota; to a town just starting

up good, and my father was the postmaster. It was a very small town. It had a hotel, grocery store, saloons, a livery stable and a Post Office. They had about twice as many saloons as they did buildings. Always had saloons. My father was a good Baptist so they had nothing to do with alcohol.

One time I remember the cowboys coming into town, getting drunk and racing around on their horses and shooting. My mother was afraid and crawled under the bed and took me along.

The Rosebud Indian Reservation was close by and Indians as well as other people came for their mail and they knew us because Father had the Post Office. The Indians were of the Sioux tribe and lived in Hogans. I remember they called me papoose. The government gave the Indians navy blue blankets (big things) to keep warm and also gave meat (cattle) cut in strips to dry.

Mama had an old Squaw, Indian woman, make a pair of moccasins for me when I was still a baby. My mother said she took a straw out of the broom and measured my foot. The next time she came to town, she brought the moccasins. They were made of soft deer skin and all covered with red, white, and blue beads. Real pretty little things. I kept them until my little brother Johnie wore them

---



and he wore them out. I was about nine years old when he was born.

When I was just a little girl, Grandmother Shattuck [Ida's mother] lived in Nebraska, and Mother visited her. (Grandmother Crabtree, Father's mother, lived with us.) We had a big horse with a white face and Mama had a buggy to teach school. We came to a stream called Ponca; it was dry. Sometimes, it had lots of water and then the horses swam and brought the buggy.

Other people were afraid to cross the reservation. Mama and her mother could ride across the sacred grounds because they had permission from the Indians who recognized the spotted ponies they rode.

They told me I was the only white child in town until I was four years old. My playmates were dolls but mostly animals—cats, a dog, two horses and two cows, pigs, and chickens. The folks had a garden and a place for the animals on the outskirts of town. I rode the two tame old horses around in their yard. I had a swing and was happy by myself.

My old black cat's name was Simon. I enjoyed dressing him up in doll clothes. When he got tired of it he ran away.

My mother said she gave me a bowl of bread and milk one day. I took it outside to eat and she came out to see where I was. I was sitting on the ground with the cat and dog in front of me. I would take a bite and then give one to the cat and then one to the dog and then one for myself again. I must have had them trained to wait patiently for their turn. That is not natural for a dog and cat to be so patient.

I also had a pet pig, Moses. I'd call, "Here Moses, Moses." He would come running from

## Norden and Springview

### Norden,

#### Keya Paha County, Nebraska

Norden, established in 1885, was named after a town in Germany near the North Sea. One hundred sixteen years after Myrtie was born, Norden—population 10—is still a very small town. It is the current site of the Keya Paha County Fair and Rodeo.

### Springview,

#### Keya Paha County, Nebraska

Springview was a young frontier town when the Crabtrees arrived.

Named for a natural spring west of town, Springview is the County seat of Keya Paha County, and was established in 1884. In July of 1885, Springview had a post office. A year later, they had a courthouse, which was a simple wooden building.

About 25 miles from Springview is Ainsworth, Nebraska, where Clinton and



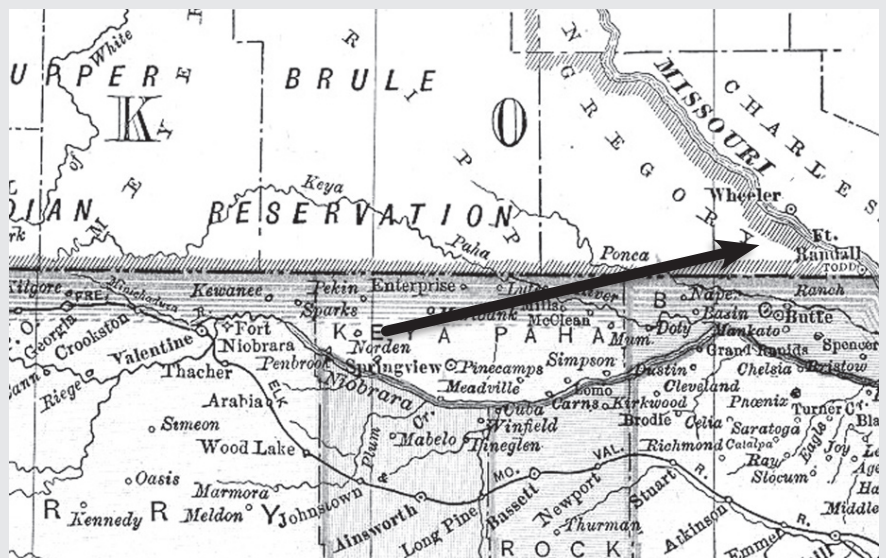
*A photo of an unknown Nebraska town that is in the family picture collection.*

Indy Briggs and their son Irwin (Myrtie's future husband) moved in the early 1890s.

In 1892, the Crabtrees moved to Bonesteel, South Dakota. They missed the drought of 1893–1894, when no crops were raised for two full seasons.

There were 244 people living in Springview, Nebraska, in 2000, according to the census.

Cousin Mildred Amick Horton, 99 years young, lives in Springview, and remembers Myrtie. Mildred's mother was Mae Williams Amick, Myrtie's first cousin. ❀



North of Keya Paha County, Nebraska, is the Rosebud Reservation. It is called Upper Brule Indian Reservation on this 1895 Map. To learn more about the reservation, read *Rosebud Reservation* on page 5.

The line points from Norden and Springview, east, across the Keya Paha and Ponca Rivers, to the area of Bonesteel and Fairfax, South Dakota, northwest of Ft. Randall.



wherever he was. Even when he was a huge, full grown pig, Moses would come running when called.

When I was four years old a man came in and started another store. He sold cloth, that is woolens and velvets, that the other store did not. He also sold hats. They were red felt; some had white birds on them. My mother bought one for me without the bird. She and my grandmother didn't think it was right to have birds on hats. That was quite the style for a few years though.

This store keeper was married and they had three children, so I had someone to play with now. One girl was my age, with black curls and dark eyes. Her name was Hazel Harrison. They had a pet lamb that was a curiosity to me. I could only go to visit one half hour to an hour at a time.

My aunt Rachel (father's sister) and Uncle Jim must have come shortly after my folks did to Bonesteel. Uncle Jim started a barber shop in one room of their house. They never had children and Aunt Rachel used to make dinners with her little China dishes for her and me. We had good chicken dinners I remember. She died when I was four.

When I was 12, my Uncle Jim came and gave me the little dishes and a pair of scissors she had had 12 years he said, and asked me to see if I could keep them that long. I tried but lost them before too long.

My father bought grain from farmers to take to the mill. I went with my father when he took a couple of sacks of wheat and one of corn to the mill at Fairfax, a town not too far away. He had the grain made into flour and meal.

He used to get wood from the Indians. The trees grew by the

## Bonesteel, South Dakota



*John and Ida Crabtree with daughter, Myrtie.*

### **John, Ida and Myrtie Crabtree**

Mama and her Papa were great pals. He was not a disciplinarian. He left that to Grandma. One day Mama had done enough that even Grandpa had had enough. He told her she had to go out and get a stick because she needed a spanking. Feeling terrible that her father thought she was so bad, she slunk around looking for the right piece of wood. She finally found what she wanted and gave it to her father who couldn't help but break out laughing when he saw the small chip of wood. Mama said that if it had been her mother, she would have put it in the palm of her hand and given her the spanking she deserved.—*Mildred Briggs Lufburrow and Mary Briggs Austin, Myrtie's daughters* ❀

### **Town of Bonesteel**

In 1892, the land in South Dakota, from the Missouri River to the 99th parallel, was opened for settlement. Bonesteel, as it was eventually called, was one of two trading posts set up that year.

Bonesteel's first building was a store built in 1892. A saloon was built second and a gambling casino was built third.

For several months, Bonesteel was nameless. Then a Mr. Bonesteel offered to contribute \$100 toward the building of a school if the town was named after him. By 1893, there was a schoolhouse in the town of Bonesteel.

Bonesteel had a population of 34,000 people by 1904, and had become a tough town with several hundred gamblers and outlaws. Robbery, shootings, and brawls were common events. The citizens' police, in an effort to deal with the problem, marched up the main street of Bonesteel, stopped at every building and questioned its occupants. If the occupants had no reasonable excuse for living there, they were forced to join what became a huge parade of angry citizens, outlaws, and gamblers parading down the street.

In the early morning hours they were taken before Judge Jim Gaughen and convicted of vagrancy and ordered to leave town or go to jail. No one had time to choose jail because the townsmen took them to the depot and boarded them on a train, and stood guard until they were safely out of town. This event came to be known as *The Battle of Bonesteel*.

The town's population now is about 300. ❀

## Rosebud Reservation

### Sicangu Lakota Oyate or Rosebud Sioux

I never tired of Grandma telling me about her father having a trading post, or about the Indian lady that made her moccasins. I have wondered about the name of the tribe the Indian lady was from. How excited I was to read in Grandma's own words the location and name of the people that were so good to Grandma—the Rosebud Sioux.

The Rosebud Sioux, as Grandma called them, belong to the Sioux that roamed and hunted the Great Plains for centuries. Today, over 20,000 Rosebud Lakota live in south-central South Dakota, on the Rosebud Reservation which has over 900,000 acres of pine-covered hills, canyons, and rolling prairie.

Originally, the words *Rosebud* and *Sioux* were not part of the Lakota vocabulary. Rosebud was the location the Federal Agency designated for the Sicangu People in 1877. It was named for the numerous wild rosebuds that grew along the banks of the south fork of the White River near the agency.

*Sioux*, was the last syllable of *nadowessiuux*, the French mispronunciation of the word, *Nadowisiwug*, meaning *snake-lesser*. That is the name which the Ojibwa called the Dakota or Santee Sioux to the west and south. The Ojibwa called the Iroquois, their enemies—*Nadowe* or snake.

The Great Sioux Nation is divided into seven bands which speak three dialects: Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota. The names mean *friends* or *to be friendly*.



1880: Before the Rosebud Reservation. Photo: [www.manyponies.com](http://www.manyponies.com)

The seven bands form the Seven Council Fires or *Oceti Sakowin*. The Rosebud Sioux belong to the Lakota or Teton Band. They call themselves Sicangu Lakota Oyate or Burnt thigh people.

The name *Sicangu* was taken as a result of a sudden prairie fire in eastern South Dakota that trapped the tribe, and destroyed their village as well as killed many of the people. Some people were able to escape by jumping into a lake. Many had to run through the tall prairie grass which was on fire, and burned their upper legs. Since that time, they have been known as *Sicangu*, which the French translated *Brule* or *Burnt Thigh*.

The US government officially recognized the Lakota as *Sioux* in 1825, and have continued to incorrectly apply the name *Sioux* to the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota in official documents.

The Tribes of the Great Sioux Nation signed The Great Sioux Settlement with the United States in 1880. The treaty established the boundaries of the Tribes (reducing the amount of their Tribal homelands from earlier Treaties), and recognized their rights as



Indian man on his pony.  
Photo: [www.manyponies.com](http://www.manyponies.com)

a sovereign government. These boundaries were further reduced by later Homestead Acts.

The treaty promised certain goods would be delivered to the Lakota at certain designated agencies, which did not happen. The tribes were forced to move to these agencies or starve. The Sicangu people were moved five times before the Rosebud Agency was finally established.

Chief Milk, an Oglala Sioux, and his band were the first to settle on the Rosebud, making their home north of Bonesteel. Swift Bear followed and eventually settled south of Burke on Ponca Creek. Later Medicine Bull settled south of the White River. ❀





*Myrtie, as an adult, still loved animals.*

water and the Indians gathered the “jags of wood” as my father called them. They were whole trees, and not cut up. They told the price by holding up their finger: whole finger was one dollar; one-half finger was 50 cents; one-quarter finger was 25 cents. My father chopped them up or if it was too big, used a saw, a buck saw.

I went to school in the school house they built when I was in third or fourth grade. It had four rooms. They came in from the country which was settling up;

the farmers all had that 160 acres from the Homestead Act.

At first, school lasted one month. Then they got to making it two and three months. We went out to play in the snow at recess and lay down in the snow on our backs and made our arms go up and down and made “angels”.

Everything was held there at the schoolhouse—Sunday School, visiting preachers, Punch and Judy Show. There were no towns around beyond us, so the visiting Preachers just stopped when one happened to go through. A little dog always went to church and sat under the chair. Once a bunch of Free Methodists came to town, got happy and jumped around and one shoe lace came loose and the dog ran out after the shoe lace.

Johnie was born September 18, 1900. In 1901, they put the railroad through. Everyone turned out to see them laying ties. Mama carried Johnie. I can see them yet.

A new town was starting west of us and they gave us a free ride there. Must have been a caboose we rode in. My father and I went, not Mama. Passenger cars hadn’t come through yet, just work cars putting in the railroad.

My father had a wagon shop after he left the Post Office where he fixed buggies and wagons. We had a house on one side and Grandma Crabtree had one on the other side of the wagon shop. I could always go to Grandma’s house anytime I wanted.

### **The Crabtree Family Moves to Iowa**

Then my father traded all this property for a farm in Iowa. He was led to believe the farm was one with lots of apple and fruit trees. He believed the man and didn’t go and see it first.



## John Crabtree's Business, Bonesteel, South Dakota, 1903



*From the left: Myrtie in the white dress, John and Ida Crabtree, LeRoy in the stroller type cart and Johnie.*

This Bonesteel picture was probably taken in late 1903. Great Grandpa and Great Grandma are in the 1905 *Gazeteer* for Harrison County, Iowa, so they must have been there in 1904, when it was being compiled. My grandfather, LeRoy, was walking by the time the photo was taken, which had to make him between about eight months and a year old. Hence, late 1903, probably, and before spring 1904, the most likely time of the year for relocating. *Photo and comment: Cal Bivens.*

He hired a freight car, took all the furniture and cows (I don't know if he took chickens or not, I suppose a few). My mother and children, (She had LeRoy by then, born January 11, 1903.), went by passenger car train. I was 12 by then. Mama bought a dime's worth of apples to put in our lunch on the train; just a few apples as there were no apple trees in South Dakota, so apples were expensive.

When we got to a place where we had to wait over for the next train, (Missouri Valley, Iowa), Mama walked down to the stores and saw a lot of Iowa apples. She asked for 10 cents worth of apples. They began filling sacks with them.



*Uncle Jim Walker who had married Aunt Rachel Lilly Crabtree, visited Myrtie and her family years later. Back row: Uncle Jim, Irwin Briggs, Laura, Myrtie, Mildred. Front row: Mary (my mom) and John Briggs.*