

## Farmer Elkton Resident Recalls Daredevil Stunts Near Kellogg

A letter to a friend who is interested in pioneer history. Sept. 24, 1974

Your keen interest in the way of life in the early pioneer days in Douglas County and your efforts in the researching of this early history is favorably received by those of us who read your notations. As one whose memory dates back to the late 1890's, I would like to share with you some recollections plucked from the pigeon-holes of my memory.

The present fad of daredevil stunts performed by the riders of two and three wheeled vehicles of transportation, called bi and tri cycles, with the desire to fly through the air like the man on the flying trapeze, has followers from toddlers to theologians. This infestation of man and gas powered vehicles reminds me of the contrast between the use of bicycles today and when I was an eight-year-old boy.

There were only three bicycles in the rural community of Kellogg in the early 1900's. These were owned by my older brother Cyrus; Ben McCollum, a man in his late twenties; and a seventeen year old neighbor named Etsel Langdon. It was the much-publicized stunt of Evil Knievel that opened the door of memory. Knievel's performance was voluntary, while Etsels' was not.

Etsel was quite a character with a very fertile imagination, and had he lived in this generation he probably would have been an outstanding figure. He was an orphan boy who lived with his grandfather, Abram Langdon under very primitive conditions, along the old military road through Mehl Canyon, south of Elkton. I do not know how and where he got his bike which was modeled for lady riders. When asked he never told the same story twice.

One time, Etsel had been to Elkton and was returning home. When he topped the ridge south of the Alfred Haines ranch he moun-

ted his bike to coast down the hill to the ferry landing just below the present Highway 138 bridge across the Umpqua River. The old county road from Elkton passed directly to the river about half mile below. In places the grade was around twenty percent.

All went well until he struck the first steep pitch when he lost control. His bicycle was not equipped with the hub-coaster frame, the back pedaling on the direct drive, so he was without brakes. Only someone who has actually ridden one of these old style bikes would understand Etsel's dilemma. He was going down hill too fast to dismount, so all he could do was ride it.

Etsel, evidently from sheer fright, kept his feet off from the flying pedals, and began yelling for help as he gained momentum. There was no way to judge his speed but he got stopped just at the rivers edge at the ferry landing. With a ramp as elaborate as Knievel's, he might have jumped the Umpqua.

Thinking of Etsel and his escapades brought to mind another incident where a twelve-gauge shot gun and a bicycle both were involved. Etsel's gullability made him the recipient of many practical jokes. He and three companions, George and Charles Willan, and Ben McCollum organized a moon hunt once.

Etsel was assigned the shotgun with, supposedly the shells beforehand emptied of their loads of shot. Knowing that Etsel was quite superstitious, alot of hair-raising yarns were spun along the trail. Meanwhile George had slipped away and rigged himself up in a sheet to resemble a departed spirit. He manuevered around so he could show up before the rest of the gang. When he appeared in their path near a spot which they had been fabricating a tale about being where a man had hanged himself, Charles and Ben began jabbering as if in fright and yelled, "Shoot it Etsel!"

In the excitement Etsel banged away at the phantom about twenty yards away. His shot found its mark. The supposedly dum-dum shells had enough shot still remaining to plant a dozen or so number six bird shot in the side of the ghost. The elaborate trick resulted in Ben McCollum riding his bike 27 miles to Oakland to summon Dr. W.C. Gilmore to pick the pellets out of the spirits' side. Luckily none had penetrated into the abdomen.

In my memory review, I recall another time Etsel became involved in a gun incident. In those days it was customary to carry a fire arm, much as some people carry umbrellas, just in case it might come in handy. Game was plentiful then and one never knew when he could bag a pheasant, grouse, or even a deer for the family larder.

In the summer of 1900 our family still lived in the Ziba Dimmick house near the north approach of the present bridge across the Umpqua at Kellogg. It was Etsel's custom to make his

rounds among the neighbors, arriving just before the noon meal. On this particular occasion Etsel carried a 38-40 repeating 73 model Winchester. As there were several small boys around my mother took the gun and laid it on a bed in a room, giving strict orders for us boys to stay out of the room. My brother Robert, just older than I, got curious and crossed the deadline. He worked the lever and put a loaded cartridge into the chamber. Not knowing how to let the hammer down he pulled the trigger. The bullet went through several folds of bedding, through the foot board of the bed and thru a double wall, landing in a bank of dirt in the back yard.

After the ruckus had quieted down and the culprit properly punished, I went out and dug the bullet out of the ground. Sixty-four years later Robert and I, upon recalling the incident, together examined the wall for the bullet hole to prove our story to the present owner of the house. It was still there but had been filled with putty and painted over.

Sincerely yours,  
Harold A. Minter, Portland  
(H.A. Minter is the author of "Umpqua Valley Oregon and Its Pioneers", and was born and raised in the Elkton area. Now retired and living in Portland, Mr. Minter is recovering from surgery performed this summer to correct an arthritis-damaged hip socket. The above letter is one of several he has written to me in answer to my request for historical data from him.)  
Barbara Tucker

ETSEL WAS SON OF ALZENA (LANGDON) AND JIM WAKER  
BUT WAS RAISED BY HIS GRANDFATHER:  
ABRAM LANGDON

Cousin to Oscar