

Pioneer Days Preferred

By Catherine Edmondson

By LESLIE ERNENWEIN

Although she is one of the few women who remember how it was to live on a homestead within what is now the city limits of Tucson, Catherine Edmondson isn't much impressed by modern conveniences and labor-saving devices.

"Women seemed to have more time in the old days," she said. "Housework can be done faster and easier now, but instead of having more time, there seems to be less."

In 1897 her parents, Charles and Alvina Edmondson, homesteaded 160 acres in the Speedway-Tucson Blvd. area. There was no Speedway then, and no Broadway. Miss Edmondson recalls only one through thoroughfare, Tanque Verde road, traveled mostly by coyotes and rattlesnakes which were the region's chief inhabitants.

Miss Edmondson attended the old Mansfeld School across from Armory Park on part of the site now occupied by Safford School. It involved a six-mile round trip that in winter was often begun before sunup.

She and her sisters (Alvina, Frances and Grace) had tromped their own trail around greasewood thickets and through arroyos to the school yard. In warm weather it was a common occurrence to find the trail blocked by coiled rattlesnakes.

"I remember one that was bigger than most," Miss Edmondson said. "It refused to budge—just sat there rattling the loudest I ever heard. We pelted it with stones. That made the snake angry and it struck so hard its whole body left the ground. My sister Frances was real good at killing rattlesnakes but she didn't kill that one."

Coyotes howled every night. She recalled that one, more bold than its fellows, invaded the yard in daylight and made off with a chicken.

But worse than coyotes and rattlesnakes was an odd character who frequently hid behind brush clumps and then darted across the trail in spooky fashion as the girls approached.

"I think he was demented in some way," Miss Edmondson said. "He frightened Frances while she was walking home alone after dark. It was very hot that night and my other sister, Alvina, had gone to bed out in the yard. Frances and I were discussing her experience when we noticed a man standing beside Alvina's bed. He seemed to mumble something to her, so we grabbed whatever we could get our hands onto and rushed out there to save our sister.

"I swung a broomstick. Frances, who had

snatched up a rifle, shouted that she was going to shoot—and then my father asked what all the fuss was about, and we felt very foolish."

Her father, who worked nights at the Southern Pacific shops as a machinist, had come home early and stopped in the yard to chat with Alvina.

The family lived in a redwood frame house that was a landmark on the desert east of Tucson. Even though they lacked such modern conveniences as electricity, gas and city water, there were compensations.

"Our well was 125 feet deep and it gave the most wonderful water I have ever tasted," Miss Edmondson recalled. "It was cold on the hottest summer days."

Another nice thing was having your groceries delivered.

"We traded at Ivancovich's Grocery on Congress street. Once each week a clerk would come out to our place (at what is now 2625 E. 1st St.) in a two-wheeled cart and take our order. Next day he would deliver it. That's better service than we get today."

Asked what she thought about the current practice of furnishing school bus transportation for teen-aged youngsters, Miss Edmondson said: "I think it's silly. They should do more walking out in the air and there'd be less sickness. I think children are mollicoddled too much by their parents. We walked to school, rain or shine, and

thought nothing of it.

"Youngsters used to have chores to do, but not any more. Boys wanted to be strong then—they took pride in being mannish. Now it appears to be right the opposite. They seem to want to be delicate."

The old redwood house was torn down in 1946 to make way for extension of First street. But Miss Edmondson and her sister Alvina live within a few feet of where it stood.

"Sometimes we used to walk to where the streetcar line ended at the University of Arizona main gate and ride the rest of the way to town," she recalled.

"It was not uncommon for a man to ask the driver to wait while he ran into a store to buy something. Everyone had time then. Women had time to bake bread and do lots of things they don't have time for now.

"It seems as if the more things are speeded up, the less time we have. Maybe there are too many gadgets."



—Citizen Photo

CATHERINE EDMONDSON