



Glen Elder, KS -- Heritage & History

~ Memoir Lane ~

Running Off to Join the Gypsies

by X Miller -- Grand Niece of Ernie Norris

If you ask any of the old-time local folks about me, its hard to say what you will find out. I guess one of the worst things I ever did in Glen was, when I was very young, run away from home every time the Gypsies came to town. The Glen Elder people did not like the Gypsies. They would even hire an extra Constable when they came to town. Maybe rightly so, because the Gypsies were not very honest.

They would make a trip through Glen Elder at about the same time every summer, do odd jobs, sharpen knives, scissors, saws, sell the farmers horses, tell fortunes, and misappropriate anything they could get their hands on. They used to camp in a grove of trees down along the river bank close to the railroad tracks that went past the old grain elevator. The only way one could get to their camp was to walk a pretty high railroad trestle that went over the Solomon, or maybe it was Limestone Creek?

As I was a night person as soon as everyone in the house was asleep, I would take off to watch the Gypsies dance. Now, at 4 years old, and very, very small for my age, walking on the rails over the trestle was the only way I could go. I couldn't take a step big enough to make it from one railroad tie to the next. At night that might have been a frightening thing for most girls to try, but I didn't think twice. Off I went, barefooted and in my nightgown, to find the Gypsy camp, just like an experienced circus highwire walker. The Gypsies danced almost all night, and I could hear the violin and guitar music all over town, as well as see the flames from their campfire well before I got there.

The first time I escaped and ran off to become a Gypsy, my Great Grandfather woke up soon after I left. After a quick search of the house and the front porch, he knew right where to look. Though one could drive to the camp, it was farther around than walking so I beat him there. I was sitting at the campfire having the time of my life when he arrived, but I knew that I was in big trouble. Right away he told them he was there to pay the kidnap ransom. He pulled out a few bills (I don't know how much he thought I was worth?) to give to the head of the clan, talked horses with him for a while, then accepted a cup of coffee and carefully looked over all of their horses before gathering me up and carrying me to the car to go home.

Before he left, he told the head of the clan that I would probably be kidnapped again their next time through. (Probably with a WINK, WINK!) So, if they would just let him know, he would be right out with the ransom money. It was my very favorite event of the year, going out to dance with the Gypsies. As dangerous as it was roaming around on a railroad trestle at night, he never once stopped me. And, he personally took all of the flack from my Grandma and Uncle Ernest who thought that I should have been punished because the Gypsy's were dishonest enough to keep me when I showed up.

They might have, too, if Grandpa had not known where to go looking for me.