

WALTER CHRISTOPHER HEBBE

by Glendon Hebbe Starr

Walter Christopher Hebbe was born March 23, 1893 to William Christopher and Mattie (Potter) Hebbe. He was very special as he was the first as well as the only boy born in a Hebbe family that we know. There were six sons in my Great-Grandfather's family as well as several daughters. All the sons married and had children but all had daughters except William. William and Mattie had four daughters and one son, Walter. He was the fourth child in the family. Walter married and had two daughters, Eileen and Glendon Jean. He was my father. I'll try to write a little about his early life as told to me and then as I remember him.

A lot was expected of a son in those days. Men were the head of the family and a lot of responsibility came with the position. Walter's parents were farmers as well as his grandparents. His grandfather was a farmer but was also a blacksmith. He even forged a lot of his tools and some of the tools are still in the family today as my Aunt Irene has them. (I hope she has them identified and that they will someday be passed on to some member of the family.)

Walter's father was a farmer as well as a fair-to-good carpenter. A lot of the buildings that he built are in use today. He taught some things of this trade to my father, but what William and Mattie really wanted him to become was a lawyer. They sent him to Capitol City Business College after he completed his education in Dover. Dad loved the soil and all aspects of farming and he did not like some of the things being taught to him in business college. He had a distrust of lawyers which he carried all of his life. After he completed his courses at the college he still wanted to farm the land and asked his parents what they wished for him to become--a crooked lawyer or a farmer! Faced with such a decision, of course, they chose the farming profession!

Dad loved animals and one of my earliest recollections of him was his tending to the needs of the livestock. He was always building sheds for them and in the winter months made sure they had plenty of straw to bed down in. He took good care of the animals but often became so fond of an animal, he couldn't bear to sell it so kept it far past its usefulness. He chose mules instead of horses because he thought they made better workers. My grandfather had horses for he liked them better. There was a strong difference of opinion on this between the two. I don't know if Dad would have made a good lawyer or not, but he was a good farmer.

He was quite inventive and was always constructing something to make life easier. We enjoyed a lot of conveniences that other farmers did not have. He was more inventive than he was mechanical-minded, but had little training or motorized vehicles

available. He had one steam engine he bought to use to operate a threshing machine. He was going to thresh wheat for others to add to his income. This turned out to be a disaster. The engine was so large and cumbersome it traveled only five miles an hour and usually took a day to move from one place to another.

The steam engine required a lot of time to get ready "to go to work" so valuable time was wasted each day. It seemed the engine was always breaking down and it took a long time for repairs. After a couple of years on this venture, he had the opportunity to sell and get rid of it and he did.

He had only one tractor and as he said, "I'm under it repairing it more than I'm on it" so he got rid of the tractor and went back to farming with his dependable mules. It seems he traded the tractor for mules. The ironic thing is he usually finished working the fields before neighbors with tractors did. Tractors were not very dependable in those days.

The first car I can remember Dad having was a Model T Ford pickup. It had a fabric top, hand-operated windshield wiper, and isinglass curtains to put up in bad weather. This truck was used rather badly and I remember him driving it across listed ridges bouncing from one ridge to the other. He drove this for a long time, its fabric top rotted and flapping in the wind. The truck had to be cranked with a hand crank and was hard to start. Sometimes he would crank until he'd have to stop from exhaustion. One time the weather was so cold and the motor so stiff he couldn't crank it. He built a small bonfire under the motor to warm it and nearly burnt it up before we could push it away from the fire. He didn't try that again.

The next car he had was a new 1928 Pontiac. It was beautiful. It was troublesome from the start, hard to start and often died while driving down the road. He finally had the carburetor replaced with a Model T one and that ended the trouble. Dad just wasn't a mechanic of any farm machine he used. However, he probably should have applied for a patent on some he invented. To mention a few--an automatic hog feeder, a sled with cutter for reaping legume crops, and a wheel that could be drawn between row crops for weed control after the crop had grown too tall for cultivating.

Our water well went dry and a well driller was hired to drill a new one. Dad wanted it close to the house as he hated to carry water. After the driller hit three dry holes in the area we wanted the well, it seemed we'd have to continue to carry water a long distance. The driller suggested we try a man that used a "devining rod" to find water. Dad was a non-believer of this practice, but in desperation to secure a well, consented to hire the man.

I remember watching this old fellow with a forked stick held in front of him as he walked back and forth across the yard. All at once the stick began to quiver and then pointed straight down to

the ground. The man marked the spot and said to drill there. The driller did and, you guessed it, a good water well was discovered. Dad never again made fun of the use of a "divining rod". This well was in use for over forty years until it was contaminated with salt water.

Now we had a good well, close to the house, but Dad had heard of a new pressure tank water system operated by a windmill and he didn't want to carry water. He borrowed money and the system was purchased and installed. Water lines were run to stock tanks, the chicken house and the house. A sink was purchased and installed and we had running water in the house--the first farmer in the area to own one. But this was just the beginning.

He constructed a float system to place in the stock tank which insured a full tank of water all the time. He made a pit under the water hole in the chicken house so a lantern could be placed to keep the water warm during the winter cold. In the kitchen he bought a water heater tank and placed it behind the woodburning cookstove, then somehow had pipes running through the stove and heated the water. We really enjoyed all these conveniences and were the envy of all that knew us.

He never got to construct the bathroom, but we did take showers under the yard sprinkler in the summer. Dad was very imaginative and inventive and if he had lived to see electricity come to our area, I'm sure we would have had a good many more things to enjoy.

I never heard my father ever say my name and always he referred to me "as the kid here" or "Sister". In fact, I was his "handyman" and he called "sister" to come to his aid so often that my sister said she was glad she didn't have that name. I followed him around and ran his errands. I enjoyed it.

When I was getting older and wanted to do some things my own sister was getting to do, such as learning to drive, he told me before I learned to drive a car, I needed to learn to drive a team of mules. I always accused him of tricking me for once I learned to handle the team I worked some in the fields.

I ran the cultivator, drove a wagon to market with loads of wheat and he would accompany me in another wagon. I wasn't ordered to do these things but was asked which I'd rather do, these things or help Mom with the washing, gardening etc. Driving a team sounded like more fun than scrubbing clothes on a washboard. Eileen preferred the housework anyway. I did learn to drive a car later on and that was even better.

Dad had a temper and cursed a lot when he was angered, but never took out his temper on any of us. He never spanked us and except for a swat on the seat one time when I squeaked a gate just as he had finally gotten a calf up to it to go through, I can't remember any such discipline. All he had to do was yell at us and it hurt more than any spanking ever could.

He was very protective of us and would take us wherever we wished to go, then sit up late to come after us rather than have friends bring us home. He always said no young whippersnapper was going to beat his time. Maybe he knew them better than we thought.

He loved to go to town and visit with people. In the summer we went to town often in the evenings and just sat in the car and observed the people while he chatted with friends. He was a big teaser and laughed and joked a lot. He had a multitude of friends.

He was a very heavy smoker and smoked Prince Albert and Bull Durham tobacco. He rolled his own cigarettes. Sometimes Eileen and I would buy him two cans of Prince Albert and then roll him some cigarettes for his birthday. They were either too fat or so loose they wouldn't stay together. We bought him ten cents worth of salted peanuts and in those days, that bought a lot of peanuts. They were as bad for him as the tobacco usage and feel it contributed to the heart disease we didn't know he had.

In the early morning of July 24, 1935 he suffered a fatal massive heart attack. We were crushed by his death and our lives were never the same again. To me, he will always be very special--the last of the Hebbe name or not. He will always live on in my memory.

