

## CHAPTER TWO

Years later when another generation of Butlers had grown up, father and mother used to regale my brothers and sisters and myself with tales of the early days in the frontier town of Galena. Shortly after their marriage father and mother acquired an old, abandoned hotel and converted it into a hostelry that met with standards of that day and called it the Butler House. From the stories father told, there must have been a large number of heavy drinkers among the lumberjacks, timber cruisers, engineers and others at that time who were breaking new frontiers to the new west. With the hotel, cafe and bar they must have done a thriving business. There wasn't too much cash in circulation during those early days and most of the business done in the Butler hostelry was done on credit with patrons settling their accounts at the end of each day or each week, or each month, as the circumstances distated. Keeping a ledger of accounts was mother's job.

One of father's best customers, he used to recall was Ulysses S. Grant, who was to become the

eighteenth president of the United States. As a boy, Grant had worked on his father's farm. Later he was graduated from the United States Military Academy; he had served as an officer under Generals Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott from 1845 to 1848 in the war with Mexico. Grant resigned from the army in 1854 and became a farmer and real estate dealer in St. Louis for the next six years. Father first met Grant about 1860 when he clerked in his father's hardware and leather goods store at Galena. Father used to say that Grant was one of the heaviest drinkers in the community. One ledger that he kept for many years, showed the progressive stages of Grant's drinking habits from Monday thru Sunday. On Mondays Grant would confine himself to about seven or eight drinks, on Tuesday it would increase to ten or twelve, on Wednesdays Thursdays usually fourteen to sixteen drinks. Seldom did the ledger indicate Grant's consumption of whiskey on Saturday to be less than thirty drinks. Every Saturday night, the ledger showed, Grant would put into the ledger over his signature a written <sup>statement</sup> ~~entry~~ stating "I'll never drink no more". Father used to say that he didn't like Grant, because he was lazy, self-opinionated, dictatorial and hard to manage. But he was a good customer.

It seemed that everybody who was anybody came to Galena because it was the principal river route to the West and the Great Northwest.

Minnesota, which had already outgrown the swaddling clothes of a territory was bidding for statehood, beckoned to the fast swelling immigrant population to come further west. The spirit of adventure still had hold of father and mother. After a few years at Galena they picked up their belongings and my oldest sister, Katherine, and took passage on a Mississippi side-wheeler headed for St. Paul. The young family disembarked at Pine Bend and in a few weeks father caught on as a school teacher. There, my oldest brother, Walter, was born. The country was wild, father used to recall and some of the people were just as wild. He taught all of the subjects in the elementary school, had about forty pupils in one room, ranging in age up to eighteen and twenty years. and he supported his wife and two children on a salary of thirty five dollars per month, nine months of the year. During vacation season he worked on the farms and in the field at harvest time. Mother sewed, knitted and churned butter and also was adept at the spinning wheel and made her own homespun clothing for herself and the family. As a young farmhand, father witnessed the birth of the cradle as a harvest tool and it became a forerunner of the modern reaper. By 1858 father and mother and their young family were at Rosemount, where father staked a forty acre claim and built a one room tarpaper shack in which to live.

Lakerville (1858)

(1858) date

Rec 83 notes  
on Lakerville  
mother made  
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Mother shied away from the community life because of the heavy drinking and fighting in the village. The following summer they moved to Hazelwood, Minnesota. The next winter my sister, Belle, was born. (Oct 21, 58)

*Greenwood Min  
EP*

Unrest over the slave question was already causing a serious cleavage between the North and the South/along about 1858 and 1859 when father established the Butler family in the contracting business. His first role was that of a sub-contractor for the Chicago Milwaukee and St Paul Railway doing borrow pit work on the rapidly expanding railroad development. Within a few weeks father found himself responsible for the payroll of sixteen men. Mother set up a boarding house and furnished the men room and board. When the general contractor failed father found himself holding the bag for the five hundred dollars he would have made on the job. Later he settled the delinquent account for two barrels of whiskey, the equivalent of about <sup>at</sup> sixty gallons, worth on the market ~~about~~ that time about nine dollars a gallon. While the whiskey lasted there was a great deal of merriment around the shack in which they lived.

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A year before the war between the states got under way father and mother and the children took an eighty acre tract of land near Waterford, Minnesota, about five miles northeast of Northfield in Dakota County. There they built a one room log house with a shed roof, hauling the logs and other materials by ox team over six miles of rugged road from Rush Prairie

*EA - Bush Prairie*

Minnesota. It was in this log house that my <sup>three</sup> four other brothers and myself was born. John was born in 1861, William in 1863<sup>4</sup>, Pierce in 1865<sup>6</sup> and Cooley in 1868. The youngest, I was born in 1870. A cash farm produce, consisting largely of wheat oats/<sup>and</sup>barley. had to be hauled to the only cash market in the area<sup>at</sup> Hastings, twenty miles away on the Mississippi River. I recall in later years Mother telling us that sister Kate was a big strong girl and helped in the fields doing the work of a man. Belle being of a frail nature helped take care of the children, make the clothing and keep house. All of the children's education during those early frontier days had to be obtained during the four or five months a year that the country school was open. supplemented by instructions from their parents at home. As they advanced in years, the older children Kate, Belle, John and Walter<sup>4 Pierce</sup>, went to Carleton College, which at that time rated little better than the high schools of today.

Prejudices were as rife then as they are today. Religious prejudices at that time were far more bitter than any racial prejudices known in modern times. There was a time when voters in the school district got together at a special election and voted to move the public school across the Cannon

*see E. P. 104  
memoirs  
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river so that the Butler children would be unable to get there. So for some years, public education was closed to some of the younger Butler children except during the winter months when it was safe to walk across the river. But, for some reason the public school seldom was open during the cold months and for the most part father instructed us in the academic subjects at home. Mother raised chickens and turkeys which she took to Northfield to trade for sugar, clothing and shoes usually twice a month, with a team and wagon. It was about 1860 that horses replaced oxen on the Butler farm. There were only mud roads and no fences and the five mile journey to Northfield was usually one that was planned for several days in advance. There was an unwritten law among the farmers that, if cattle wandered onto a neighbors land it was perfectly proper to drive them off, but no dogs were to be used and cows bearing calves were not to be run. One day, one of our neighbors chose to disregard this law of the range. His name was Bill Ryan. Father was watching from a shed one afternoon when he saw Ryan mount his horse nearly a mile away and take after our cattle. Ryan raced the herd right up to our front door. Father sidled up alongside Ryans horse tore the man from the back of his steed and went to work on him. Mother told it this way;

"They fought with all the fury that was in them. Pat let loose with a vicious kick, missed his victim and slammed his shins up against the hub of a wagon wheel. I can still hear him howl with pain. That ended the fight."

When Mother and sister Kate got to Father blood was running out of his shoe tops. When mother asked him if he would ever learn to quit fighting father answered,

"How did I know he was going to move his leg?".

Ours was as I remember the only Catholic family in the area. Our neighbors were for the most part Scotch-Canadians, Massachusetts Yankees, Congregationalists, Methodists and a few Episcopalians. And those of our families who had strong national or religious tendencies and feelings held on to them. Looking back at those days it seems that we were at odds most of the time with one neighbor or another. Participation in community life as it is understood today because of these circumstances became impossible. But the Butler family had an intense loyalty to each other. To apply an old cliché it was one for all and all for one.

There was a time when brother Walter got into a fist fight with a lad much larger and heavier than

himself. Patently Walter was getting the worst of the brawl. And Bill Butler perceiving Walter's predicament tore into the house and came out with a long hatpin. A few jabs in the right places and the fight was over.

The cold war between the Butler family and our Dakota County neighbors reached a new high one winter when a segment of ~~one-of~~ our most bitter protestant protagonists circulated a petition to bar the Butler children from the public school. This was after the abortive attempt to accomplish this same end by moving the schoolhouse had failed. After the petition had received wide circulation and contained enough signers to accomplish the purpose the school board members called on father to apprise him of the action. I can remember father giving them a tongue lashing they would long remember, locking them in the wood shed and threatening to keep them there until the board rescinded its action against us. A compromise of some sort must have been worked out following that incident because in later years some of the Butler children were to teach school there.

It was about ~~1885~~ 1886 shortly after Cyrus McCormick invented the reaper which automatically cut the grain and tied it into bundles for the first time that father got the agency for selling



these binders and harvester machines in his area. His territory included the Rosemount district where we had lived some years earlier and where father had built his first shack. Curious about the old neighborhood father went to look at his former home. Not finding the house and after making some diligent inquiry he learned that it had been stolen and moved off the land. On a hunch he confronted and accused an old enemy Mike Velie and said to him.

"you're the son-of-a-bitch that stole my shack. " Obviously he didn't sell Velie any machinery.

Father's unrestrained propensity for keeping the neighbors and the neighborhood constantly stirred in strife became increasingly difficult thru the years for mother to bear. She was a mild gentle and considerate soul and after each fresh fracas in which father became embroiled usually confined herself to this sad but mild admonition, "No, Pat, not again".

The routine around the Butler household was something like this based on the old ditty, early to bed early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise. up at three-thirty am in the summer, four am. in the winter, out to the barn to do the chores, milk the cows, feed the livestock clean the barns. While the children were looking after these duties father could be seen every morning of the week taking a turn around the ninety acre farm that we owned. He somehow had the notion that he was the master of all he surveyed. We had our own milk, butchered our own hogs had

chickens for fowl and eggs and there wasn't too much that we had to buy. It seemed that Mother was on the go from early morning until late at night. Father objected to either Mother or the children having any social intercourse beyond the family circle. Rather than oppose him Mother gradually buckled under and I don't recall in my early youth ever going visiting to other people's homes or them coming to see us.

I can remember disobeying my Mother but once. It was my turn to dry the dishes one night. I ducked out for an hour. When I returned the dishes were done. Mother just looked at me and said nothing. As punishment for my disobedience Mother refused to allow me to help her with the dishes for two weeks. That really hurt. In the same circumstances Father would have cuffed me half a dozen times and then a couple hours later have given me a nickle.

Father had taught me the abc's , multiplication tables and the rudiments of long division before I started to school when I was about eight. Well do I remember my first day in school. Brother Cooley who was two and a half years older than I, much bigger and stronger both physically and in character had arranged in advance that I was to whip a boy named Freeland. In the first place I didn't want to fight and in the second place I couldn't lick anybody had I wanted to.

It was much like the case of the man who didn't want to fight and his opponent who was glad of it. Young Freeland took courage from my fears, slapped me around me around a few times and the fight was over. I was pilloried with laughter at the school but the worst was to come. When father heard the story of my cowardice that night he was furious. I didn't know then that father had fought one of my adversaries older brothers a few weeks earlier and had come out second best. The knowledge that one of his sons had refused to avenge his honor was a violation of the code inherent in being an Irishman. It was doubly acrimonious because father was convinced that at least one of the Freeland boys was a chicken thief, and what was worse had stolen some of our chickens. No paternal blame ever attached to any of the Butler boys for fighting but was to any one of us who came home after having been licked. The fact that your adversary was not an Irishman or a Catholic was sufficient justification for a fight any day in father's book.

Looking for reasons into <sup>this</sup> ~~the~~ singular twist in father's complex makeup I can see now that he was not a good farmer, that his neighbors always had better crops, that it irritated him and he resented it; a man educated and skilled in the engineering crafts father had neither little liking and little interest in farming which was so necessary.

I have wondered if the environment in which he was raised in Ireland didn't also contribute to the warp in his character. Steeped in an adolescent and bitter hatred against the absentee British landlords and nobility because of their oppression of his own father his efforts to subordinate these early prejudices were ill-concealed. There were a few families of Englishmen and north of Ireland families four or five miles from where we lived and I can remember that whenever father met them in town it meant a fight. One close neighbor had been a Catholic but joined the Protestant church at Northfield and thruout his life father referred to this man as a turncoat or a left handed Irishman.

In our family all the children from the oldest to the youngest had daily duties to perform from the time we were able to walk.almost. The jobs included picking up the eggs, filling the woodboxes, sweeping the floors, dusting the furniture, washing and ironing the clothes and helping with the dishes on the inside plus countless jobs that had to be done around the livestock and the farm. But there were so many Butler children that we ordinarily fought for the jobs to be done.

Our house like those of our neighbors were lighted with candles., except for the few rish in the

community who could afford coal oil lamps. And when we ran out of tallow we usually put some lard in a saucer, a twisted rag for a wick and that was it. Father's ungovernable temper was out of control a good share of the time. And this plaint by my Mother still rings in my ears,

"Pat do you want these boys to leave home?"

"Be more gentle with them Pat," she used to plead.

The only trip I can ever remember on which Father took me with him made me an eye-witness to one of the most dastardly crimes in the history of Minnesota. It was the early fall of 1876 and I was about six years old. Early that morning John Pennington who later married my sister Belle called at our house. He reported that a neighbor's child had died the night before and he wanted my father to help him dig a grave in the Catholic cemetery at Northfield. We had quite a time getting started that morning. It seemed that all the fates were conspiring to prevent my first trip to the then big city. I remember we had trouble catching the driving horse in the pasture. Then the harness broke. But finally we did get under way.

We had just pulled into town as I remember it when Mr. Pennington called my father's attention to

eight men who were sweeping across the prairie on horseback. We watched while they dismounted in front of a saloon, and when they came out we followed them into the town. Father and Mr. Pennington I recall seemed unusually apprehensive. WE had paused on the brow of a hill above Northfield's bridge square where the First National bank of Northfield was located when the shooting started. As I remember it three of the desperados had gone into the bank leaving their five confederates outside to cover the escape route. As I remember it two of the bandits Stiles and Pitts were killed in the doorway of the bank. A man by the name of Manning owned the hardware store near the bank. Thomas Coleman Younger, better known as Cole Younger, the co-leader of the gang came out the side door of the bank and he and Manning exchanged several shots. There was a young man, a young Swedish immigrant, walking up a flight of stairs when Cole Younger called to him to stop but the young immigrant couldn't understand English, so Cole Younger shot him thru the head.

(End R/1/S2)

A Doctor Wheeler who was a pretty good shot ran to the hardware store after he saw what was happening got a gun and picked two of the gunmen off the street. Doctor Wheeler also shot Cole Younger's brother Bob so that he was in no shape to follow the escaping bandits out of town.

After the smoke of battle had lifted Father and Mr. Pennington decided it was safe enough to go down to the scene of carnage. Manning lay dead at the foot of the stairs, two of the bank robbers were dead and two others of their number lay wounded. I remember Father meeting a one armed flour miller by the name of John Ames. I remember Ames walking up to two of the dead bank robbers lying in the street and kicking them in the face.

"Can't you see they're dead," Father admonished Ames. "Leave them alone."

Father was at his best in the excitement of the holdup, the shootings and in the chase that followed. Sheriff Barden was at the scene a few minutes later. After instructing Mr. Pennington to look after his son Father joined the Posse and stayed with it for several days. He used to tell about the pursuit and capture years later.

When the possemen got too close to the bank robbers the posse would stop their horses and there were several exchanges of gunfire at long range.

Finally the desperados were surrounded and driven into a swamp. The three Younger brothers Cole, James and Robert were captured and the fourth was killed. Winti Within a few weeks the trio was arraigned on murder charges in the first degree in the Rice County District Court and pleas of guilty were entered. Minnesota at that time had capital punishment. After a short hearing, however, the presiding judge sentenced the three men to life imprisonment. In 1889 the youngest of the three Younger brothers died in prison. In 1901 twenty five years after the robbery the other two brothers were paroled. One of them committed suicide the following year.