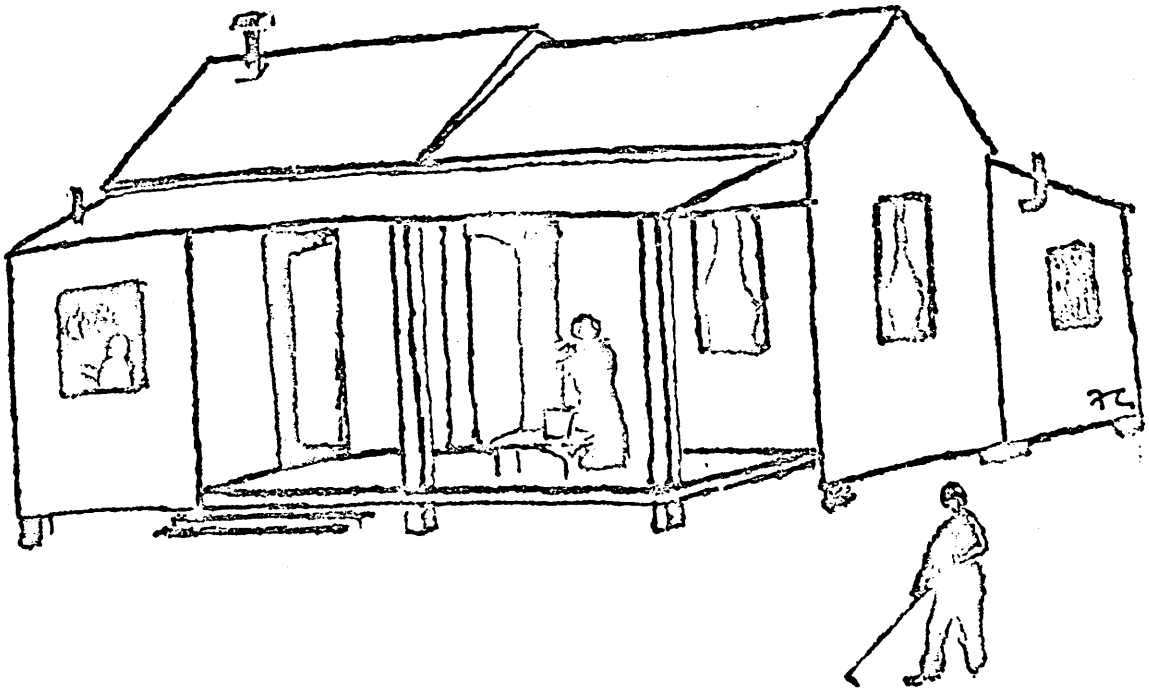

V. Turning the Corner

Central Texas was still a young man's country; above all a man's country. The Seguin Enterprise of August 15, 1902 noted that there were 222,212 bachelors and 94,317 maidens in Texas, and that "a young woman's chances to marry are more than two to one in favor of Texas against the old states east of the Mississippi." Given the conditions of life and health few were the inhabitants of Central Texas who reached their three score years. John Ireland was one of the few who reached his seventies. Eventually he suffered from a prostate infection, uremia set in, and he died in 1895. When a doctor explained that it was one of the reproductive glands that was affected, frontiersmen neighbors dismissed the matter, observing that any man who had worn out that part of his anatomy had nothing to complain about.

The drawing shows the Guadalupe County house improved.

Soon after John Ireland's death his wife went to live with her youngest daughter, Mrs. John Carter, at Luling. Some time earlier, presumably when George bought his first hundred acres of land, John Ireland had sold part of his holdings to a German neighbor to the South, August Dreibrod. After his Father-in-law's death, George bought the remaining Ireland property, estimated at 88 4/10 acres "more or less" from Mrs. Ireland and her children. The deed was executed on December 27, 1899 (See Deed Record Book No. 15, p. 497 of Guadalupe County in Sequin Court House). The price agreed upon was $2210 dollars at 9% interest with payments distributed over four years.

After the Ireland home was vacated George secured a Mexican family to live in it rent free. They had an adjoining garden spot and the right to allow their donkeys to graze in the pastures on the mesquite grass, mesquite beans, or whatever they could find. The man of the new family was to be used during planting and plowing seasons at the standard rate of seventy-five cents (six bits) per day if his mid-day meal was provided. If he ate at his own expense the wage was the newly inflated rate of $1.00 per day. The regular day's work lasted from sunup to sundown with an hour off for the mid-day meal while the animals rested. As the days grew longer and the sun became hotter the custom was to extend the mid-day rest period to an hour and a half or even to two hours in extreme cases.

Milk was available from the family cows (they usually had two now so that when one became "dry" the other could provide milk and butter for the family) at five cents a quart. But Mary's measure for a quart frequently came nearer to half a gallon, especially if the supply was plentiful and the

rude blows of grubbing hoe (a kind of mattock) or axe cutting through the roots under which the snakes were hibernating the creatures were likely to strike blindly and with little of the warning rattle for which they were so well known.*

This kind of work suited the typical Mexican peon. In fact he often preferred such piece work as cotton chopping (paid for by the acre) and cotton picking (paid for by the 100 lbs. harvested), to regular wages. He liked to work at his own speed and be his own boss. In one case George had agreed to some grubbing that was to be done toward the end of the summer while the weather was still hot and before cotton picking had begun. The work itself seemed to progress with reasonable speed but he never found the two men concerned at work. When he asked one of them about it the answer was that it was hot in the day time but the moon was full so they had been working by moonlight. And why not? Time meant little to the Mexican peon, whether it was the time agreed upon for a meeting, for work, or for play.

In preparing land for a crop the first step was to turn the soil over systematically with a turning plow. A good man with a stout team could only be expected to complete an acre a day. But with a good geam and "clean" cotton or corn, a good workman with a cultivator (a machine that had two small plows one of which ran on each side of a row of plants) might be able to cover up to six acres a day.

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*Just after 1900 a Mexican worker on the farm made quite a nice side income by catching rattlesnakes for a Zoo in San Antonio. He received $1.00 per pound for live snakes. The accompanying picture shows one of his largest prizes.

In cotton chopping which was paid for by the acre women and children were glad to help. An average worker (usually referred to as a "hand") could chop two acres a day if there were few weeds. In this case he simply walked slowly along the row of cotton and chopped out the weeds and surplus plants leaving the healthiest stalks about fifteen inches apart. The good worker advanced with a kind of rhythm. Raising the hoe waist or shoulder high he brought it down with a healthy swing to cut up growing weeds. Then followed one or two effective short chops for petty weeds or stalks of surplus cotton. As the hoe returned to its maximum height the worker took a step forward and so was in a position for the next series of strokes — then repeat, and repeat. If the cotton was free of weeds the special effort of the vigorous stroke might be omitted: but in either case vocal workers indulged in a sing-song chant of usually wordless tones. Others, especially if the cotton was "dirty", attended strictly to business and proceeded grimly with their task.

By 1900 the continued grubbing had cleaned most of the pasture land. The house, barn and water tank area took up about three acres; the little pasture about ten acres and the big pasture about twenty acres. Sorghum and corn were planted for feed and usually took about ten acres. This left about 150 acres for cotton and an acre or so for George's frequent experiments in garden truck or alfalfa, milo maize and the like.

During the poverty-stricken days of the middle nineties there was little time for politics. Indeed, Ralph A. Smith ("The Grange Movement in

Texas", Southwestern Hist. Quar., XLII, No: 4 (Apr. 1939), p. 307) comments: "... the farmers during the middle nineties became so disgusted with organizations of every type and so depressed by crop failures and six-cent cotton that they lost interest in their own welfare." Now the scene changed.

The whole nation was awakening and became conscious of the world as a whole. Harper's New Monthly Magazine from October to December, 1899 ran articles on The Philippines, The Volcanic Andes, India, Siberia, British South Africa, China, Asia, Central Asia, Russia in Asia and on the Dreyfus Case and the British Ambassador Lord Pauncefote. The local paper, The Seguin Enterprise, for February 3, 1899 reported that a Japanese vessel had left Galveston with cotton for Japan and added "when we secure the Nicaraguan Canal these vessels will be a common sight at the wharves in Galveston ...."

The People's Era of San Marcos, however, was bitterly opposed to imperialism, and its rising clamor for new markets and colonies. It reported claiming (March 2, 1899) that under "the rampant reign of expansionian" the Federal budget had approximately doubled its old figures. Under the title of "Christianizing" it printed on October 5, 1899:

> For the greed of gold and the lust of land
> Armed to the teeth the Christians stand,
> To rob the heathen with a bloody hand.

Kipling's White Man's Burden was quoted with an introduction which duly referred to the verses as "remarkable" and stated that they "are understood to be addressed to the American people, and intended to incite them to the exploiting of fire and sword as missionary agencies ...." Then was quoted (February 16, 1898) a bitter parody including such lines as:

Go, armed with book and bullet,
Till Tagal throats salute
Your boasted bird of freedom,
Half condor and half coot.

How much of this George saw is unknown but it is certain that some of it came his way. He, however, was a product of the proud old British Empire and the cadences of the White Man's Burden certainly appealed to his spirit. He had an innate respect for the rights of class and accepted the Darwinian thesis without hesitation. His Mother's teachings and his experiences in London all gave him an incipient missionary spirit. Later he was to buy the collected works of Theodore Roosevelt whom he considered to be somehow misguided as a Republican, but nevertheless a great man. As for the new overseas possessions he more or less considered that these were the natural acquisitions of a growing nation and a developing people. Had not England done the same?

Came the golden year 1900. The depression was past and the boll weavil had not yet arrived in sufficient numbers to destroy the cotton crop. The Spanish War had brought new colonies and a surge of confidence and nationalism that was reflected in the very tone of newspapers and magazines and in produce markets. Nothing succeeds like success and the American people were "on their way". Even nature smiled. The rains were just right. The cotton fields of central Texas put on a good crop. Just when the bolls had matured and were ready to open came more rains. New growth at the ends of the cotton bushes put on new blooms and set a top crop, as it was called. A few years later the boll weavil would have ruined this late

crop, but here it was. The result was that George and Mary found themselves harvesting an unheard of bale of cotton for each acre planted.

The total crop in the nation was reported to be somewhat short so the price was quite high even though the buyers were suspected of paying a bit less than a proper price. George accordingly held most of his cotton and stored it at home. Toward the end of the season he carefully sampled each bale by ripping open the bagging. Next he laid back the top layer of fibre that might have been stained and took out a generous handful of lint. This was carefully tied with string and labeled to indicate the bale from which it was taken. Then with two flour sacks stuffed with samples he set off to make the rounds of the markets of San Marcos and New Braunfels to get bids. The next day, in spite of a late return the night before, he took a new team and set out for Seguin to get more bids for he had agreed with the first sets of buyers that their bids would stand for forty-eight hours only. All offers were based on the price of cotton at Galveston less the costs of transportation to the port. A major difficulty lay in the estimation of these costs. In calculating them the buyers naturally gave themselves the benefit of all doubts. Cotton might dry out and lose several pounds per bale in transit, and there was always the possibility that scales might vary. Truth to tell these variations were much more likely to take place in local scales and to the farmers' disadvantage than they were at the port where government inspection was reasonably effective.

When George got back from Seguin it was about ten o'clock at night. As soon as he drove to the barn and started to unhitch his team,

Mary called out: "What did you get?" The weary man answered but his voice was muffled by the clatter of the hames as they were tossed onto the harness peg attached to the stable wall. What she thought she heard was "Down". Had the price collapsed a half cent or so? If so, would the previous high bidder honor his offer? If he did not the failure to sell the previous day could easily mean a substantial loss. With a heavy heart she turned to get the warmed-over and long-delayed meal ready for the traveller, scarcely able to choke back her disappointment.

Seeing her despondent look George became concerned: "What's the matter? Are any of the children sick?"

"No. All is fine."

"Then why so dourly (pronounced "dowly").*

"Oh, George, I did so hope the price would hold. We have waited so long for the new house."

"What's the trouble? I told you I got a dime, and the best bid I got yesterday was nine and a half cents. I sold every bale we have and have the written agreement here. Day after tomorrow two wagons are to start hauling the cotton to Seguin, and you and I are going to San Marcos tomorrow to spend some money. While you buy cloth for new clothes for the family I am going to the lumber yard."

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*Only occasionally did George or Mary indulge in Old Country expressions or pronunciations. On coming to the New World they made it a point to employ local pronunciations and word usage so long as they conformed to good grammar. They were determined that their children should not be considered queer. After Mary had been in this country only six months a neighbor gave her quiet enjoyment with the comment: "Why, you speak English surprisingly well."

After some talking it was decided that Herbert would accompany his parents to San Marcos with an extra team hitched behind the old hack. Once in town the men visited two lumber yards and left at each a detailed list of the building supplies that would be needed for the new home. The lists showed every item George estimated would be needed, from sills, studding, ceiling and weather boarding to bricks and cement for two flues and even building hardware. Meanwhile George and Herbert shopped for a new Studebaker wagon.* This was necessary for the old wagon alone was not likely to be able to stand the strain of the heavy cotton marketing, plus the hauling of the building material that was being bought. On return to the lumber yards it was found that the best bid was a straight $14.00 per thousand board feet for all lumber, except shingles, needed for the new house.

Meanwhile Mary had not been idle. First came purchases of gingham and calico for dresses for herself and Ethel. Then came a frivolous organdy with fancy lace for the girl, percale for Sunday shirts for the men folks, bleached and unbleached domestic for underwear and splendid new lengths of 10/4 bed sheeting. This was enough cloth for one purchase. Next came a dozen spools of J. & P. Coats sewing thread in assorted sizes for fifty cents the dozen. Shoes and other items of clothing would have to wait. No, not enough yet. A trip to the grocery store secured a 48-pound sack of flour and the regular supply of frijoles and miscellaneous items. In keeping with her new reckless spirit Mary added a dozen bananas and an equal number of apples. The merchant said that oranges would not come in for another month.

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*Farm wagons cost from $65.00 to $75.00 at the time. See advertisements in The Seguin Enterprise, p. 3.

Then came the ultimate recklessness. Mary bought two of the newly marketed cans of peaches. George was very skeptical about these. Preserved fruits in glass were known to be safe but tin cans were reported to be highly poisonous if improperly sealed. The sequel came the next Sunday. When the family returned from church they brought back a neighbor family to eat Sunday dinner. Meanwhile the cans of peaches had been placed on a shelf on a plain piece of paper. Neither had oozed liquid in that position for twenty-four hours so presumably the bottoms were properly sealed. Next they were turned over on the other end for a second test — similar negative results. Now George and Mary proceeded with the final step as the guests looked on. Each can was carefully watched as a can opener punctured the lid to see if any of the contents spewed out (another danger signal). All remained quiet. The guests were warned of the impending hazard and were offered cake if they preferred not to risk eating the suspect food. They all agreed to take the risk, pronounced the dish delectable — and suffered no ill results.

Next came the exciting house building. One of the neighbors was known to be a good builder. George asked him to take charge of the work for three weeks to get it well under way. As foreman he was to receive $3.00 per day. Before he arrived George and the boys ceremoniously went to the selected spot directly on the top of Rattlesnake Hill. The house was to be exactly oriented to face the north. Accordingly the base line was run after dusk one night so that the house would face directly to the North Star. Next day the

corners of the building were established and holes dug for the corner posts of heavy cedar logs. Various neighbors had offered a day of work in the spirit of the old frontier tradition. They were all told to wait until a certain day for the roof raising when extra help would be needed. Meanwhile George and eighteen-year-old Herbert and the foreman had worked steadily. Frank, at a busy nine years of age could fetch and carry effectively but the youngest boy at four was doubtless more of a nuisance than he was worth. Sills were laid, studding erected and rafters cut.

At dawn on the appointed day the neighbors and their wives appeared. The men brought their hammers, saws and other tools they thought might be needed. The women brought along small children who could not be left behind, and also food such as cakes and pies. The result was a jolly day for all while the men worked steadily. "Drinkings" composed of lemonade, hot coffee and small cakes were sent to the workers (a coffee break) at 10:00 o'clock. After a generous dinner at 12:00 noon the men returned to the job and by nightfall the most difficult part of setting the rafters had reached the point where it could be finished with limited help. By sundown men tired from heavy work and stuffed with a large dinner as well as refreshments at mid-morning and mid-afternoon took their equally tired families to their own homes to do their chores and get to bed.

The six room house contained a kitchen of about 10 x 12 feet; a living room of about 14 x 22 feet; a hall that ran through the house from north to south providing a breezeway in hot weather measured 12 x 18 feet;

and two bedrooms beyond the hall completed the building. The front bedroom was for Ethel. It was an architectural triumph and boasted a hexagonal style end front with windows in each of the northwestern, northern and northeastern exposures. Behind this and also opening off the hall was George and Mary's room. Later what was called the "new" room was brought up from the old house to be added below George and Mary's room to form a distinct L to the building. In front was a small porch and at the back was a long gallery faced facing south and west along both sides of the L . In the "new" room the boys had their domain.

Transporting the room to its location was a job in itself. By dint of hard work and levers the room was raised to rest on skids. Unfortunately there had recently been heavy rains and the only road between the two houses was the "turning row" where plows turned around in cultivating the crops. That black waxy soil was both slippery and sticky. Six horses and mules were hitched "f to the contraption to haul the load room across the field. The animals were straining to their utmost but showed signs of flagging. Once the forward movement stopped it would be next to impossible to start again. George, Herbert and the two Mexican helpers were shouting and cracking their whips, apparently in vain. One of the horses named "Prince" was a buggy horse that had been impressed for this special job. To urge him to greater effort George struck the animal with his whip. That was too much, the high-spirited animal which was already doing his best, He stopped in his tracks and balked. Shouts and blows were useless, he was through. In due

time another animal was added to the team and the job was finished, room was moved but Prince had broken his old habit of obedience, asserted his independence and a once reliable animal would periodically thereafter assert his new found independence.

The four year old boy was amazed at the new affluence, then became quite concerned lest the family might not have enough buckets to catch water from leaks from so much roof space. The new structure had double walls with sheeting on the inside of the studding. Then came the ultimate in the way of gracious living: wall paper for the living room, the hall and the two main bedrooms to take the place of the old newspapers that had been pasted up to help seal the cracks in the old one-walled house. There was wainscoting around the living room and the hall — and the floors were varnished. The window sashes were counter-balanced by weights and did not have to be propped open. On top of all that, the outside of the house was painted. As Ethel put it: "It is not too bad to chop cotton if a girl can come to a place like this."

Next came agonizing sessions with the Montgomery Ward and Company catalogue. Freight from Chicago to San Marcos was about $1.60 per hundred pounds (depending on type of goods to be transported). By waiting from two to four weeks for the freight deliveries mail order buying offered greater variety and cheaper prices than could be secured at the local in San Marcos or Seguin. stores.

Naturally the local Texas merchants heartily resented this competition. Their attitude was reflected in the local newspapers. The Seguin Enterprise

on November 8, 1901 suggested that customers write and ask Sears Roebuck and Company and Montgomery Ward and Company to contribute to local churches and to local efforts to fight the boll weavil. The Hays County Times (June 23, 1905) wanted to know which mail order house would exchange merchandise for the farmers' "wheat, oats, corn, beans, butter, eggs and hay." What about sheep and hogs? Did mail order houses support schools, aid in building roads and bridges and help with town, county and state expenses? When such arguments fell on deaf ears and the local folks continued to spend their money where they could get cheap goods the attacks became more vicious. Sears of the Sears Roebuck firm was pictured as a shyster and trickster who had gotten rid of his partner though the partner's name was still used in the firm. This company was accused of having bought 3,000 bicycles at a blanket price of $6.50; all alike except for color, These were retailed at three prices: $12.65; $21.50 and $26.50. Whatever kind was ordered, the same article was sent. A similar practice was said to be followed with mens' suits though they were retailed in three price ranges at $12.50, $15.00 and $18.00 (The Seguin Enterprise, April 26, 1907). When such charges came to the attention of George he would simply shrug them off with the statement that he preferred to buy locally where he could see his goods before purchase, but that the squawks of local merchants indicated that they were substituting noise for quality.

After careful consideration dining room table and twelve chairs of golden oak were selected. For the two new bedrooms there were golden

oak dressers and wash stands to accommodate a wash basin with pitcher, and a commode modestly placed in a closed cabinet below the wash basin. The beds were the latest model iron steads with brass trimmings. When the order was at last completed, checked and double checked, it was mailed to Chicago. After an agonizing wait came the breath-taking notice from the railroad freight office that eight boxes and crates of household goods and furniture were at the freight depot awaiting delivery. If these were not claimed within a given period they might be returned to the sender, or might be sold at auction to defray shipping costs. How ridiculous could a great corporation become!

Herbert was commissioned to go to town to claim the shipment. He was cautioned and recautioned to examine every crate and box to be sure no damage had been suffered in shipment. He took along two heavy wagon sheets (untreated tarpaulins) to cover the wagon in case of rain on the return trip. Though he returned home well after dark the whole family was at the front door awaiting him. As soon as George was assured that all was well he issued the dictum that the load would remain untouched until morning for there was no danger of rain. He well knew that there would be no sleep if those boxes and crates were opened. The next morning the wagon proceeded to the New House and the beautiful new acquisitions were reverently unpacked and placed in their appointed places.

Another of the new luxuries acquired in the next year or so was a fine carriage to take the place of the old hack that had long since seen its

best days. The old vehicle was little more than a flat box constructed across two axles and resting on simple springs. The new vehicle was entirely different. Its bottom curved sharply upwards just behind the front seat. This allowed the front wheels to swing back under the conveyance for a sharp turn. The dashboard was patent leather, and the top had a fringe all around.

Another new purchase was recorded in Frank's diary for

~~In connection with these furnishings it may be of interest to note that two years later Frank's diary*~~ records that on Sunday (February 1, 1903): "We got the hanging lamp today from Mrs. Watsons as the mail carrier brought and left it at Mrs. Watson's on Fri. ...." The box was too large to go into place in the new R.F.D. mail boxes that were placed alongside the main road so a thoughtful mail carrier had left it at a neighbors rather than run the risk of its being stolen if left in the open beside the Gallcott box. The next day the lamp was installed, and a marvelous thing it was. It was suspended by an ingenious set of small chains that were attached to spiral springs in a brass holder. The holder itself was screwed firmly to a ceiling joist of the room. The springs were adjusted to such a tension that the lamp could be lowered or raised and yet would stay at any required height. It was a beautiful if somewhat gaudy thing with nickle and brass ornamentation. The circular wick, called a sun-burner, was about two inches in diameter and gave far more light than the old straight wick lamps that were carried around the house. Of course it burned kerosene but could illumine a rather large room. A tinted glass shade some twenty inches in diameter with a

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*This diary (see illustration on p.) was kept by Frank, the second son, from February 1, 1902 until March, 1908.

circular hole in the top for the chimney covered the whole and served as a reflector. Dependent from the shade were cut glass crystals. Maybe a bit ornate but it was a symbol of beauty, culture and comfort. Ethel, about seventeen once more expressed her pride: "This is a house to <u>live</u> in."