

Pioneer Days: The Blizzard of 1881

By Mrs. Mary Ann (Harrington) Lyons of Nunda South Dakota

Mary Ann Lyons was the wife of **Jeremiah Lyons (1855-1893)**, the son of Jeremiah and Ellen Lyons of County Waterford, Ireland. The story that follows was printed in a document: **Pioneer Days in Lake County, P. E., editor, Karl E. Mundt, Historical and Educational Foundation, number six, Dakota State College, Madison, South Dakota 1980.**

I found this document in a collection in the public library of Madison, South Dakota. Although it is dated 1980 it would appear that the contents were written down at an earlier time when school children went out into the community around Madison, South Dakota to interview the senior residents. Mary Ann Lyons says she was 22 in 1881 when the Lyons family migrated from Iowa to Dakota Territory*. Thus Mary Ann Harrington Lyons was born in 1859 (in Iowa). She was 80 years of age when her story was recorded which would be in 1939. This story was recorded by **Bonnie Gerrits, "told to me by Mrs. Mary Ann Lyons of Nunda."**

*Richard Lyons with his younger brother, Will Lyons-my grandfather-led a wagon train of 44 Irish immigrants from Iowa to Dakota territory and first settled at Lake Badus near Madison, South Dakota, where they joined a Swiss settlement of farmers who at that time farmed in common. ---*Robert F. Lyons, June 11, 2010*

Pioneer Days: The Blizzard of 1881

We left Northern Iowa to go to Eastern South Dakota in the year 1881. It was in the winter and when we were on the way the great blizzard of 1881 came. You couldn't see 2 feet away from you. While the storm was very bad we could not travel. When the worst was over we started out again.

In those days there were no fences and the roads were just places worn by travel. As there was plenty of snow we rode in a sleigh. We had hard times, but in those days no one thought much of hard times. We got plenty tired of the food we had and as food was hard to get we ate much of the same things.

Our home had already been built before we started, so when we got there, there wasn't so much to do before we could get settled. Before the big house was built we lived in the little shack. It wasn't hard to keep warm as it was quite small.

The only fuel we had to burn was straw. When we wanted fuel, we had to go to the straw pile and twist the straw together so it would burn longer.

I was 22 when I came to South Dakota and I am 80 now, but I shall never forget the many experiences I had here. **-Bonnie Gerrits. Told to me by Mrs. Mary Ann Lyons of Nunda**

---See NEXT PAGE: Richard J. Lyons, son of Mary Ann (Harrington) Lyons and Jeremiah J. Lyons, lawyer in Madison, South Dakota.

Richard J. Lyons

Son of Mary Ann (Harrington) Lyons and Jeremiah Lyons, Madison South Dakota

Richard J. Lyons is an active member of the South Dakota bar, practicing at Madison, South Dakota in which city he was born on the first of March, 1887, his parents being J. J. and Mary (Harrington) Lyons. The father (Jeremiah) was a farmer by occupation and after residing for some time in Iowa came to Dakota Territory in 1880. [Jeremiah Lyons was the son of Jeremiah and Ellen Lyons, from County Waterford who established a farm in Chicago Illinois, then moved to Iowa and eventually to Dakota Territory with their family.] Lake County was at that time still a frontier district, much of the land being in possession of the government and in consequence destitute of all improvements. Mr. Lyons (Richards's father, Jeremiah) homesteaded, securing the Southeast quarter of section 8 in the southwest quarter of section 9, and also obtained a tree claim in Lake County. He at once began to till the soil, finding it an arduous, difficult and worrisome task to break the sod and prepare the land for cultivation. His work however was carefully and systematically continued for a number of years and his labors were crowned with good results. He died in the year 1893 and the community thereby lost one of its representatives is its citizens. (His father, Jeremiah got deathly ill while attending in Chicago the World Exposition. He died and his body sent home on the train.) The mother (Mary Ann Lyons) survives and is residing on the old homestead. (*This was written in 1915*).

Richard J. Lyons supplemented the public-school course, in which he mastered the common branches of learning, by studying in the Madison State Normal School and later entered the University of South Dakota at Vermillion, where he prepared for the bar, being graduated of the completion of the law course with the class of 1912. It was his desire to enter upon a professional career in the same year he was admitted to the bar. He afterwards spent a year in the law office of Windsor & Keite, able attorneys at Sioux Falls, and then returned to his native city, where he opened an office for the independent practice of his profession. He has met with a fair measure of success, has been found thorough and painstaking in the perpetration of his cases and resourceful in the presentation of his cause before the courts, where he has won many notable verdicts that have furthered the interest of his clients.

Mr. Lyons exercises his right of franchise in support of the men and measures of the Democratic Party and has been the candidate for state attorney. His religious belief is that of the Catholic Church and he is a member of the Commercial Club of Madison. He is still a young man, alert, progressive and determine, and already he has attained a position in professional circles that many in older representative of the bar might well envy.

Taken from: History of Dakota Territory, vol. IV, 1915.