

Down Memory Lane
Mary Etta Broadwell

Jane Farmer Wheeler

A young girl in her native Staffordshire, Jane Farmer knew only the sheltered life of an English household. She attended the private girl school and everything was done for her well-being. As a bride, a few years later, she knew the hardships of pioneering in a strange new country.

In 1881 with her new mother, and a younger brother and sister, 16-year old Jane was looking forward to a momentous journey to America when they would join their father. Mr. Farmer, the prosperous owner of an iron works and machine shop factory in England, had sold his business with the idea of investing the funds in a sheep ranch in Australia.

He had preceded his family to America by a few weeks and when they arrived the plan was for them to go to Australia together.

Jane boarded the big ship with high hopes of adventure, little suspecting the terrifying moments which were in store for her during the 17-day journey. The storm which swept the Atlantic during that voyage was recorded as one of the worst in the annals of navigation up to that time.

The ship pitched and lunged and Jane kept to her stateroom as no passengers were allowed on deck. Due to the skill of the captain, who for three days was lashed to his bridge, the ship outrode the storm and came limping into New York Harbor after two and one-half weeks on the open sea.

Jane's mother, who was violently ill and frightened during the crossing, knew then that Australia was out of the question and vowed never again to venture on another ocean trip.

Mr. Farmer was making his home in Pittsburgh, Penn. and the little family were to meet him at the railroad station in that city. Although their train arrived on time and they were sure they were in the right depot, they were unable to locate him.

Strangers in a strange country, Jane took charge of the situation and marshaled her family into a waiting taxicab. Giving the driver her fathers

address, she was startled by a terrified scream from her little sister who was pointing an agitated finger at the driver – the first negro she had ever seen.

Later that evening a happy reunion took place. A lame foot had prevented Mr. Farmer from meeting them and somehow that had missed the friend meant to take his place.

For the next six years, the Farmers lived in Pittsburgh where the father was employed in a large foundry making the intricate mould castings for gold coins distributed from the San Francisco mint.

In 1887, they came to California where a ranch was purchased in the San Jacinto valley. Having heard of the beautiful flowers that grew in abundance in California, a disillusionment was in store for them when they arrived during the June dry spell and witnessed sandstorms which blew over the desert cactus and sagebrush of that valley.

In 1894 Jane became Mrs. Walter Wheeler and came with her husband to his recently purchased ranch on Cypress Avenue where a small frame house became her home for several years. Entering into the life of the little community the Wheeler home was the center of gracious hospitality. The first Methodist Sunday School classes were held in the dining room of their home. With their young daughter, Lucy, the Wheelers were a happy and united family.

When Mrs. Wheeler said good-bye to her husband on a faithful morning in 1904, she little realized that was the last time she would see him before his tragic death.

He left that morning to accompany his cousin, who was a noted botanist, to the summit of Mt. Grayback, where the cousin hoped to find flower specimens for the collection he was assembling for the Smithsonian Institute. During the expedition, Mr. Wheeler was struck by lightning and instantly killed.

Left alone with her little daughter, Mrs. Wheeler courageously managed her affairs and conducted a successful ranch.

Mrs. Wheeler and her daughter, Miss Lucy Wheeler, reside in an attractive stucco house which has replaced the little frame building of nearly 50 years ago when this gracious and genteel lady first became a resident of our community.

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The wedding of Walter Wheeler of Covina and Miss Jennie Farmer of San Jacinto will occur at the latter's home on May 31, 1894.