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Dobbs, John Coleman (1821 - 1901)

Dorothy Hansmann

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John Coleman Dobbs was a native of the state of New York, grew to manhood and was married there. He was born June 17, 1821. In June, 1855 he married Katherine Duncan. Her parents were James and Margaret Duncan who came from Scotland.

John C. Dobbs came to Minnesota at the insistence of his father who had migrated a few years earlier. He thought the territory offered many inducements for a young man to become wealthy, an ambition he never realized. He first located at Hastings, Minnesota, where he engaged in the butcher business but not being suited to the business he sold out and came to West Union in the spring of 1865, where he homesteaded a hundred and sixty acres in the East one-half of the South West one-fourth of Section 27 and North one-half of North East one-fourth of Section 34, Ashley township, Stearns County and made final proof thereon October 14, 1870. His first residence was made of sod with a grass roof.

In the summer of 1866 the Indians set fire to the prairie near the Dobbs home and he was forced to flee with his family. He came to the stockade at Sauk Centre where he spent the winter. He was a shoe maker by trade and made a living for his family during that winter by cobbling shoes for the soldiers who were stationed at the stockade.

When John C. Dobbs came to West Union he had very little money and no income. The wild hay crop upon his land was immense, and as he had nothing else to do after his crop was planted, he and his neighbor James Budd, started with their scythes and cut a large quantity which they stacked upon the prairie. They had no use for the hay themselves, as they had no stock with the exception of their ox team, and when they tried to sell the hay they found there was no market for it. They talked the matter over and decided they would sell the hay at 50¢ per ton if they could find a buyer. John C. Dobbs went to Sauk Centre and inquired of

"Pony" Lamb if he knew of anyone who wanted to buy hay and while they were talking, Henry Cager drove up and offered Dobbs \$3.00 per ton for the hay, which Mr. Dobbs accepted with alacrity and immediately set out for home, as Henry Cager had decided to go at once and measure up the stacks. Mr. Dobbs was on foot and he took all the "short-cuts" he knew of through the woods to his home. When he arrived home he was so nearly out of breath all he could say was "\$3.00 a ton -- \$3.00 a ton!"

In the year 1867 there was a terrible snow storm in the early part of October, and the snow stayed on until April, which caused the settlers much inconvenience and hardships as they could not get their wheat to town to have it ground. The John C. Dobbs family and many of their neighbors lived on boiled wheat and wild game that winter.

In July, 1867, while most of the men of the West Union community were at Saint Cloud having their wheat ground, a flood came and took out all the bridges and made the streams impassable for days. The school house and two residences were located between the Ashley and Silver Creek, both raging rivers many rods across with currents running strong and swift. When the teacher noticed the rivers rising he dismissed school but before the pupils reached the bridge, it had been washed away and as there was no way of transporting them across, the teacher took the entire school of twenty-one children to the home of Fredrick Karell, one of the settlers on the island. They had very little food of any kind in the cabin and no flour as Mr. Karell was in Saint Cloud with the wheat and of course would not be able to reach his home until the flood was over. Mrs. Karell was nearly frantic with fear for the twenty-one children she was forced to feed and knowing there was no help but for an act of God she sent the children outside and began praying that some means of feeding the children would be provided. While she was at her

devotions one of the children came in and said they saw furniture floating down the creek. Mrs. Karell ran out to see what had happened and discovered a large buck deer in the river with only his antlers visible which looked like a piece of furniture. She quickly returned to the cabin and armed herself with the shot gun returned to the creek and shot the deer as it attempted to approach the shore. Her prayer was answered, she had food for the children. They were marooned on this island three days before a hunter from Sauk Centre discovered their plight and made a raft of poles which he tied together with a rope made by braiding the long "slough grass." With this raft he was able to float himself across the creek with one-half bushel of flour.

John Coleman and Katherine (Duncan) Dobbs had thirteen children: Eugene Edward was born September 6, 1857; Molly was born in 1859. She lives in Seattle, Washington; James was born September 19, 1861 and lives at Great Falls, Montana; Kate was born in 1863. She lives in Seattle, Washington; John was born August 19, 1865 at West Union and makes his home in Minneapolis; Minnie was born in 1867 and died December 22, 1922; George Irving was born September 8, 1869 and lives at Sauk Centre; William was born August 5, 1871; Ralph Hamilton was born September 7, 1873 and died December 24, 1930; Ethel was born in 1875 and died in 1878; twins who died in infancy were born in 1879; Chester was born September 6, 1882; Eugene E. died January 14, 1925 at Great Falls, Montana; William died August 14, 1914 at Minneapolis.

George I. Dobbs was born at West Union September 8, 1869, the seventh child of John Coleman and Katherine (Duncan) Dobbs.

He was married November 25, 1895 to Emily Bertha Meyers at Sauk Centre. To this union were born the following children: Addie May was born May 5, 1896; Fern was born April 24, 1901; Dale was born August 14, 1905; Lee was

born April 14, 1907; and Dorothy was born August 14, 1916. Addie May lives in Sacramento, California; Fern lives in Saint Paul, Minnesota; Dale lives in Toledo, Ohio; and Lee and Dorothy live in Sauk Centre. There are eleven grandchildren.

George I. Dobbs has been Secretary of the Sauk Centre Fire Department for thirty-two years.

John Coleman Dobbs was Justice of the Peace at West Union for many years. He held many school and town offices and by reason of his being Justice of the Peace for a number of years he was generally known as "Squire Dobbs." He also held the office of Postmaster at West Union.

John C. Dobbs sold his farm in 1893 and moved into Sauk Centre village where he died July 27, 1901.

Interviewed: George I. Dobbs
Date: October, 1936
By: Dorothy Hansmann

FROM THE RECORDS IN THE STEARNS COUNTY COURT HOUSE

FOR THE JOHN COLEMAN DOBBS BIOGRAPHY

<u>Name</u>	<u>Date of Birth</u>	<u>Place of Birth</u>	<u>Father's Name</u>	<u>Age</u>
1. Lee Dobbs	May 14, 1907	Sauk Centre	Geo. I. Dobbs	37
2. Dorothy Dobbs	Aug. 13, 1916	" "	" " "	46

<u>Mother's Name</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Book</u>	<u>Page</u>	<u>Line</u>	<u>Remark</u>
1. Bertha Meyers	30	C	404	2	4th child
2. Bertha Meyers	38	J	18	442	5th child

MARRIAGE RECORD BOOK L. PAGE 5116

Geo. Irving Dobbs and Bertha Emily Myers

Married November 25th, 1896 at Sauk Centre, Minnesota

By: Rev. Thomas Billing

Witnesses: Chas. House and Mary L. Dobbs