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Script for “The Brief Life of Ernest Standing, 1858-1885”

Standing Family Reunion, 6/17/2021

By way of introduction for any who may not know me, I’m **Nancy Osborn Johnsen** – a great great granddaughter of George & Deborah Fox Standing, by way of their eldest son Henry. One of his sons was E. Gilbert Standing, who had a daughter named Bertha Standing Osborn - and I am Bertha’s eldest daughter. I live out on the prairie of central Iowa, not far from the Des Moines River, and I am retired from Iowa State University-Ames, where I was an administrative academic advisor and also a professional archaeologist. However, it may be said that archaeologists, like most farmers, never actually retire – so I still keep busy in archaeology and historic preservation work.

[Insert photos from 2010.] Regarding that “farmer” comment, I want to give a quick “shout out” to Ellis Standing, who is still farming north of Earlham and who, for years, gave many Standings memorable hayrack rides around the Bear Creek community -- a fun event as part of our reunions.

[Insert portrait & title page.] But, now, let’s discuss one of our lesser-known Standing family ancestors: Ernest Standing. In America our family reunions have usually been defined by identifying each of us by the branches of the George and Deborah Standing family, the ones who homesteaded in Dallas County, Iowa beginning in 1870. Even in printed sources it has been stated that George and Deborah had five sons from whom these branches stem. Actually, George & Deborah had had a total of **seven** children: six sons and one daughter. Edith Rebecca Standing was their 4th child and she died at less than 2 years of age in 1866. By this time the family lived east of Manchester in Derbyshire, England; Edith was buried in a Friends Burial Ground at the base of the nearby Pennine Hills. Their youngest child, Josiah Standing, was born in 1872, well after the Standings had come to America.

[Insert photo of the family in 1860.] So, getting back to Ernest - he was born on 11/27/1858 at Leigh, Lancashire – now in western Greater Manchester. Ernest was George & Deborah’s second child. His elder brother, Henry, was not quite 2 years old at the time he was born. *[Note that the boys are wearing “skirts” – a custom common for young boys in Victorian England until they reached nearly school age and transitioned into short pants.]*

With regard to Ernest’s health, Henry wrote in his autobiography:

Then came Ernest who seemed especially liable to take any ailment prevailing in the community. Smallpox was almost too much for him, but he finally recovered. However, the disease left its mark upon him as long as he lived. (Henry Standing 1934)

[Insert historic photo in Leigh.] The Standing family was living “over the shop” in a 2nd and 3rd floor apartment in downtown Leigh. George was a grocer and tea merchant and the shop faced out toward the Market Square. George’s uncle, Isaac Standing, ran a draper’s shop

next door. Then, between 1859 and 1861, the young Standing family moved within Leigh a short distance away to Church Street Terrace, where they rented a row house. This provided space for flower beds, a walled yard/garden area, and a greenhouse utilizing George's horticultural skills. It also provided a space within which the young brothers could play; they had a swing, and each had his own little garden. Near the end of 1861, the brothers were joined by yet another brother, George Edwin.

[Insert photo of school.] When Henry was around 5, he was sent to a nearby grammar school. However, Henry wrote:

I do not think my brother Ernest ever attended school at Leigh. After recovering from smallpox, whooping cough came along soon after we moved to Church Street Terrace. We three children all took it; Ernest and George (Teddy we called him) had it much worse than I did. It was the same with scarlet fever. Ernest was very ill indeed with it. While I had it, it was a very light attack, rather an advantage for I did not have to go to school. Ernest had frequent attacks of croup. From these causes he was prevented from going to school. Teddy was not old enough. (Henry Standing 1934)

Apparently, once of school age, Henry and Ernest were allowed to explore about the town on their own.

We boys were never tired of rambling by the canal side and watching the barges go by with loads of coal, pig iron, lumber etc, envying the people who lived on the barges. The stern end of the barge was decked over and the barge man and his family kept house in this part of the barge. We used to think it would be an ideal life.

. . . Ernest and I frequently went to Leigh Station to see the trains go by
(Henry Standing 1934)

In the autumn of 1864, just after Deborah had given birth to their daughter, Edith, George Standing sold his business to his long-time apprentice, James Whitehead, and the growing Standing family moved to the south of England on the Surrey/Sussex border to be near relatives of George. They included George's father, John Standing; George's half-brother, Caleb Standing; and George's uncle, John Cheal, and John Cheal's sons, Joseph and Alexander. George Standing set up another grocer and tea shop in the village of Meadvale in Surrey.

Ernest and I attended the village school. It was different from Sarah Sewell's school at Leigh. It could not be classed as a high grade school. (Henry Standing 1934)

[Insert sketch map.] Not only was the school a disappointment, but George's enterprise did not thrive - so the Standing family returned north within the period of a year or so, settling in the industrial mill town of Ashton-under-Lyne, six miles east of Manchester. There, George once again set himself up as a grocer and tea merchant, calling his shop on Stamford Street the "Hong Kong House." The family lived a short distance away. In the spring of 1866, the toddler Edith unexpectedly became very ill and died. However, it wasn't long that - with the birth of another son, Charles - they were a family of six again by 1867. Unfortunately, Charles, too, became a sickly child.

. . . my sister Edith died and was buried at Low Leighton in Fourth Month 1866. She seemed perfectly well when we came [to Ashton-under-Lyne] but went down in a hurry. Later, my

brother Charles seemed to be weakening about the same way. First they thought it must be sewer or sewer gas, or the well. They finally became so uneasy they decided to sell Park Parade. Accordingly, they took a house on Chappel Hill in Dunkinfield. (Henry Standing 1934)

Likely, air pollution from the mills (this was the height of the Industrial Revolution) may also have been a contributing factor in making the children sick. Dunkinfield was just 3 miles south across the River Tame from where they had last lived, and conditions in the new location were better. It was there that George and Deborah's fifth son, Alfred, was born in 1869.

[Insert Ackworth school drawing.] The parents felt the two older boys should be attending a proper school, so Henry recorded:

In the autumn of 1866 our parents decided to send Ernest and me to Ackworth School [located about 30 miles away near Pontefract in West Yorkshire]. A great mistake in sending Ernest; he had had so much sickness during his early school years, he had fallen behind. This and he being too young (he had not yet turned 8) resulted in his going to boarding school a failure, and he really suffered the loss of much valuable time. After a few months it was decided he had better return, and to Sunderland's School where he made fair progress. (Henry Standing 1934)

Ernest's brother Henry continued on at Ackworth until age 13, the point at which the Standing family left for America. Once in Iowa, Ernest and brothers Henry and George received just bits and pieces of schooling in Quaker one-room schools at Muscatine and then near Earlham, but these weren't very satisfactory, and oldest brother Henry ended up "homeschooling" his younger siblings for a time.

As teenagers, being the two eldest boys in the Standing family, Henry and Ernest tended to do a lot of things together. During the family's trek across Iowa from Muscatine to their new homestead, the two were assigned to ride a horse, in turns, to help drive the cattle - even though they had never before ridden a horse. Henry reported that [quote] "we had no saddle and we got so sore and stiff there was little pleasure in life." [un-quote]

[Insert map of Earlham homestead area.] Upon arriving in the Bear Creek Settlement, it was discovered that the house being built for them was not yet ready for occupancy. The man responsible for building the house took the family into his own family's home - but the two older boys had to sleep at a neighbor's house. Within the first year Henry & Ernest, along with their father, found themselves inexperienced in fighting a prairie fire that threatened to burn their new homestead - but, with the help of neighbors, they were successful in saving it.

Over the 1870s and early 1880s, Ernest continued to work with his father and brothers on the Standings' homestead north of Earlham, which - over time - more than tripled in size. The brothers were having difficulty finding ways to earn money, so by the spring of 1880 Henry and Ernest decided to try the brick-making business, using clay found on the Earlham homestead. They constructed a brickyard, dug a well, created a pug mill powered with actual "horse"

power, and used any free time to cut wood to fire the brick in their small kiln. It was only a marginal success, and they gave up the enterprise within a year.

At this point, the brothers were both still bachelors, ages 24 and 22. In 1881 their mother's sister Margaret came from England to America, and Iowa, for an extended visit. Henry wrote:

Strange as it may seem, Aunt Margaret's coming resulted in Ernest and me becoming unsettled, or rather more unsettled than we were. Aunt Margaret did not mean to make us discontented, but she told of an English settlement, many of them Friends, in the vicinity of Rapid City in Manitoba. We wrote to one person in particular who lived there and who, at one time, lived near Ayton. We also wrote to the Emigration Department of the Canadian government at Ottawa. We got replies from both and had our imagination fired. Nothing would do but that we must go there. We accordingly bent our energies in making preparations to go. We decided to drive there with a team and wagon and take most of our possessions with us, for we fully intended to settle there and take homesteads under the Canadian Homestead Law. We accordingly furnished our wagon with a weatherproof covering and fitted up the inside as conveniently as we could to live.

We bade farewell to our relatives at home and began our journey on the afternoon of Fifth Month 18th, 1881 and made our first camp about 3 miles northwest of Redfield. (Henry Standing 1934, p. 40)

[Insert sample of journal.] Ernest kept a journal of their 3-month trip to Canada and back, the major portion of which has survived. Ernest's not-so-perfect penmanship & spelling is evident throughout – obviously a result of his having had little formal schooling. Once the men reached their intended destination near Rapid City in Manitoba, they were sorely disappointed by the situation there, so they returned to Iowa. Their 3-month trip was not without adventure, which Ernest chronicled in daily handwritten notes (and Henry later summarized). They returned to Iowa in August of 1881, just in time to help at home with the harvest.

[Insert plat map of Charles Mix Co., with area indicated.] Throughout the winter of 1883/1884 it is apparent that Ernest and his two oldest brothers were making plans that all three of them would attempt homesteading along the Missouri River in southeast Dakota Territory, not far from where their paternal uncle, A.J. Standing, had earlier been the Indian Agent on the Yankton Sioux Indian Reservation. Of the three Standing brothers, only Henry was married by this time - he and his wife Eunice recently had had a baby daughter, whom they had named Edith.

Ernest was the first of the brothers to leave for Dakota Territory, traveling with the Jesse and Jimmy Beezley families – also Quakers from the Earlham neighborhood. They arrived in Charles Mix County in March of 1884 and immediately staked claims near each other on the bluffs above the Missouri River. (And at the same time, Ernest became a naturalized American citizen.) Ernest's claim included "Signal Mountain," a navigational landmark used by steamboats plying the Missouri River. Ernest dutifully wrote at least two letters back to his Iowa family – one each in April and in May.

[Insert sample photo of a Plains sod house.] Ernest had begun building a sod or log house for himself, while living in his stable for several months. *[This example of a Plains sod house may be similar to that which Ernest built - but probably without the birdcage over the front door.]* Henry's little family arrived in June 1884 and staked a claim immediately south of Ernest's; their brother George arrived even later in the year and staked a claim south of Henry – but at first George worked at breaking ground for others in the neighborhood, so by December of 1884 George's house still was not finished.

This last bit of news was per a letter written by Ernest to his parents in mid-December of 1884. In that same letter he told of an incidence of coughing up blood and having a spell of not being able to see clearly while out gathering wood. This likely was a portent of his having contracted tuberculosis, no doubt exacerbated by his rough living conditions. The occurrence of TB was fairly widespread during this era, but Ernest might have contracted it from his visiting Aunt Margaret a few years earlier – who, herself, died of the disease after returning to England. So, Ernest's having been in seriously ill health as a child had apparently dogged him well into manhood.

Ernest, though very ill, managed to return to Iowa and he sent one last letter to his brothers back in Dakota Territory in March of 1885, in which he gave instruction about how his affairs there were to be handled. Ernest's father George took on the burden of paying Ernest's share of a loan taken out to fund the brothers' homesteading venture.

[Insert photos of Ernest's gravestones.] Ernest Standing died at his parents' home north of Earlham, Iowa on 4/03/1885 at age 26 ½ - never having married nor having left any children to begin a sixth branch of the George & Deborah Standing line. He was buried in North Branch Friends Cemetery, a short distance east of Earlham.

[Insert Henry's portrait of Ernest again.] I feel that it is SO important for us to learn about and treasure Ernest Standing's life, and to acknowledge HIS role in the history of the Standing family. Several members of our family bear the name of Ernest, and likely he was the inspiration.

I hope you all found this short account of his life helpful – and, as his brother drew him in this portrait, wasn't he truly a handsome young man?

Thank you!