

ESTHER LARSEN EASTLUND

by
Winniefred Eastlund Arhelger

Table of Contents

The first school year.....	2
Fort Shaw	2
From the River Press Thursday December 13, 1900	3
Home Again 1905	5
The Summer of 1906	6
From the Ft. Benton River Press on September 5, 1906.	7
Home life	8
Religion.....	9

Copyright © Winniefred Arhelger
All rights reserved

ESTHER LARSEN EASTLUND

Esther Larsen was born on Valentine's day, in the year of the panic of 1893. Esther didn't know what she had done to cause the panic, but she was sure that she must have done something awful bad. How she came to carry that burden happened one day when she was a young child. The family was sitting around visiting with friends. Her Father was reminiscing about the hard times he had been through and got to telling about the panic of 1893 (which was caused by the country going off the gold standard). Money had no value and people had to barter to get their necessities. He turned to Esther and said, "and as if that wasn't bad enough you had to come along." So the undeserved feelings of guilt.

The birth of Esther the second daughter of Zack and Emma Larsen took place in her grandfather Moses Solomon's cabin on the Marias river south of Loma Montana. When Zack saw the bad time his young wife had in child birth he vowed, "That's enough there won't be any more", but in the next 25 years twelve more were to come. Her sister Agnes Louise, born the 17th of May 1891, was two years older. In all there were 14 children, but never more than 6 or 8 at home at the same time. Esther a small petite child with thick straight black hair and grey green eyes, soon became a favorite of her grandfather.

After their marriage Zack and Emma had first made their home in Haver and Zack was away all summer working as a cook on the round up. When Emma's father became ill and in need of help Emma returned to Loma to take care of him. After he got better they stayed and made their home in the building that had been Mose's equivalent of a "Motel". It was a long log building of four rooms. All the rooms had a door opening onto the porch that faced the Marias river. Mose was one of the pioneers who followed the gold rush to this territory long before it became a state. There was a trading post on the ranch made of unpainted vertical clap-board. The rear half of the two-room building served as his living quarters the other room was used for trading at first, until the Indian trade subsided, then it became a tavern, and later a store. At times it was also the voting place and post office. Other buildings on the ranch included an ice house and a long building where he raised turkeys, a shed for his trotting horses, a barn and a corral. In earlier years he also had a ferry and travelers would stop at "Solomon's Place" for refreshment or stay overnight. It was a place to rest, feed and shelter their horses. Esther thought it was a wonderful place to grow up.

The first school year

When the two older sisters were old enough for school Grandpa Mose cleaned out the store and turned it into a school room for the community. They needed 10 pupils to hire a teacher. Miss Shepard her first teacher was somewhat of a naturalist. Esther can still recall the scrapbook she made of pressed leaves and wild flowers. The teacher caught a bat and showed it to the class. They also dissected a frog and caught butterflies. During the summer vacation Miss Shepard committed suicide when her lover jilted her.

Fort Shaw

The family was growing; there was now another sister ready for school, Clara born 17 March 1894.

ESTHER LARSEN EASTLUND

As there still was no school in their area it was decided to send them to the Indian boarding School at Ft. Shaw. Esther remembers how anxious she was to go to school and fretted that it took her parents so long to get ready. They had to pack the wagon with tent, camping equipment, and supplies to last a week or so; for there would be eight on the two-day trip of about 70 miles. Brothers Zacharias, nicknamed "Big" was 5 years old, Bartel, who was called "Little" (even after he grew bigger than Big) was 3, and the baby Catherine Grace was about one.

They camped in a field near the school while they waited for the girls to be enrolled. At age 97 Esther still remembers she had a cup of camp-fire cooked coffee with canned milk and "it tasted so good." Emma had bought the girls quite a few new dresses only to learn that they would have to wear uniforms. The uniforms were dresses of blue and white stripes and an apron. They were made and laundered by the school and stored in cubby holes.

The dormitory rooms had about 10 beds and they slept two to a bed. Esther and Clara slept together. Any personal things were kept under their pillow or in a box under the bed. A "big sister" was appointed for each young child to help with hair combing and other tasks. Esther's big sister was Lillian No-hand and they remained friends after Esther left the school. It was Agnes, her real sister, who looked after the 2 younger girls. Whenever they had trouble with anyone Agnes would go and talk with the other child. The school children were divided into 3 groups. Esther & Clara were in the number 1 group, Agnes in number 2, and the biggest boys and girls in number 3. The school had two main buildings at either end of a rectangle with smaller buildings on the sides and a large court yard (the former Military parade ground) in the center. Because of the overcrowding, the girls attended classes only in the morning. The young kids played in the afternoon. One of Esther's teachers was cross and impatient. When Esther couldn't get her times tables as quick as the teacher thought she should she hit Esther across the nose with a ruler, an act that angered the boys in the class. Esther never had trouble with $7 \times 8 = 56$ because 56 was her cubby hole number. Here is a story about how we, her children, and many of her grandchildren, got to know that her cubby hole number was 56. We heard it when we were children learning our multiplication tables. When we came to the hard one to remember what 7×8 equals. Esther would say "that is so easy to remember because it was my cubby hole number". Then she would tell of her school days and learning multiplication became easier for us.

Grandpa Moses Salomon came to visit the school in December of 1900, staying two or three days. He brought apples, oranges and bananas. When he left the Matron passed out the fruit to everyone. The *Ft. Benton River Press* wrote the following about his visit. [Note how strong the opinions were to make citizens of the Indians, close the reservations, put an end to Indian culture, and to assimilate the Indian into the white man's world.]

From the River Press Thursday December 13, 1900

Moses Solomon, who recently returned from a visit to the Indian school at Fort Shaw, is enthusiastic in his description of the work done by Supt. Campbell and his corps of teachers. From Mr. Solomons description of the course of training, that institution must be one of the most notable agencies for the conversion of the First Families of Montana to the ideals of latter-day citizenship.

Old Fort Shaw was first established as an army post June 30, 1887, and was then

ESTHER LARSEN EASTLUND

garrisoned by four companies of the 13th. inf. For many years it served to keep the Helena and Benton road open and provided settlers from the incursions of the Piegan and other Northern Indians. It was abandoned in 1889 and soon afterward was turned over to the interior department as an Indian school.

In this work its attendance and efficiency has increased until now there are over 350 Indian children belonging to 8 different tribes, being trained so that they can become citizens when the reservations are opened and government support withdrawn.

The school is at the foot of Crown Butte, four miles above the old town of Sun River, and stands in a fertile irrigated flat along that stream, the old ditches made by the army enabling practical instruction in farming and gardening to be given while a new canal system, to be finished next year, will bring still more land under cultivation.

The Course of instruction includes all the elements of a good general education, while particular attention is given the practical branches of farming, dairying, blacksmithing, painting, carpentry, wagon making, tailoring, dressmaking, etc. Nearly everything needed by the school is raised by the pupils, and they make all the clothing and do all building and repairing necessary. The teachers many of whom have been promoted under civil service rules from the famous school at Carlisle, find their charges of both sexes fully as intelligent and teachable as white children and they surpass the latter in desire for education. Indeed, most of the pupils have more or less white blood in their veins, most of them being Pegans, and as any child of part Indian blood is entitled to admission, many are sent from places off the reservations.

The strictest military drill and discipline is the rule and hard is the portion of the stubborn or insubordinate; but with all this there are many opportunities for amusement and relaxation. The boys devote much time to field sports and baseball, while they emulate Carlisle's prowess on the gridiron with a vigor that has brought discomfiture to the high school teams of many a Montana city. The girls greatest honor is membership in the Mandolin club of 16 instruments and the boys have a really good military band.

Supt. Campbell has recommended that an appropriation of \$100,000 be made for new buildings. The old adobe and log barracks, even with improvement and additions, being worn out and overcrowded.

Mother said for punishment the pupils would sometimes be put in the old jail. A building off by its self. They attended classes at Fort Shaw only in the morning as the school was so crowded and the older students had to work in the afternoon. In all she figures they gained only about 2 years education in the three- and one-half years they were there. The girls came home just one summer. To get home they took a stage coach part way. The driver stopped at noon to change horses and eat. While he had dinner he told the girls to stay in the coach and wait for him. They didn't have any food along and none was offered. At the Teton railroad station they were put on a railroad hand car and 2 men pumped them to Loma. Along the way they saw their father on horseback on

ESTHER LARSEN EASTLUND

his way to Teton to meet them. They waved him to turn back. They all walked home from Loma together, sharing the horse two at a time.

After Christmas of 1904 Clara got sick, it was appendicitis. Her parents were not notified until January when her death was eminent. Esther and Agnes did not know of her death until their parents arrived. That, Zack Larsen was very angry about this was evident to the Matrons as they watched the dust cloud his horse and buggy created as he drove up to the school and circled around the compound to the hospital. The actions of those in charge betrayed their prejudice in their insensitivity to Emma's grief. Zack would not allow his children to stay any longer in a place that treated the parents of the Indian children as tho their capacity for love, affection, and quality of caring for their young, was inferior to that of the white parent.

Home Again 1905

On the way home Zack stopped the wagon at Solomons ranch and Esther jumped out and started to run to the house. He called her back, and said, "We don't live there anymore." She felt so disappointed. Changes had been made at home during the years they were away. Her parents had taken out a homestead claim, and built a two-room log cabin with sod roof, across the river from Soloman's place, and about two miles west of Loma. Moses Solomon had sold his ranch to Chappels. Then he had made his first trip back to Illinois to see his brothers and sisters after first spending some time at the health spas in Arkansas. Arthritis and his old wounds were troubling him. Mose now had a saloon in Kendell, Montana, and interest in several gold mines there. He spent the summer months in Kendell and winters with the Larsens. While the girls were at school in 1902 a brother Elmer was born only to live a few months. Then in February of 1904 brother Edward, nicknamed "Manny", was born. In February of 1905, a short while after their return home Dexter called "Dennis" was born. This little one lived just five months. With the death of Clara in January and Catherine in June and Dennis in July, 1905 was indeed a sad time for the Larsens.

In the early summer of that year after Zack left for the roundup, friends of Emmas had come for a visit. They would set up a tent and stay for several months. This time they brought a very high-spirited race horse along. Now Emma was a very good horse woman and she bragged that there wasn't a horse she couldn't ride. They coaxed her to try their horse. As she was getting on the horse started running straight for the river. She managed to turn him in time but they soon came to a fence and the horse stopped dead. Emma went over the horse's head breaking her collar bone. All the children were watching and were sure she was dead. They had to take her in the wagon over those rough rut filled roads to the Doctor in Fort Benton. It wasn't until six weeks later that the Doctor discovered that her shoulder was also out of place. This time they were in the Ft. Benton hospital because six-year-old Catherine Grace was sick. It was hepatitis. Esther had come along to take care of the nursing baby as Emma's arm was still in a sling. Catherine, a quiet child and the only blonde, wore her hair in long braids. She is buried in the cemetery on the hill at Ft. Benton. When Zack came home to the funeral, he ordered those people off his land because he thought they were interfering. A few weeks later Dennis succumbed to the same illness.

While the girls were at Fort Shaw a school was built at Collins to the south and across the Marias and Teton rivers. Now Big and Little were old enough to go along. The children would take the

ESTHER LARSEN EASTLUND

shorter way when the river water was low enough to ford on horseback, or when frozen solid in winter they would cross with their sleds. It was farther to take the road to Loma and cross on the bridges. Their father took them in the wagon when he could. (Loma wasn't called Loma until 1911. There wasn't much of anything there. During Esthers childhood the crossroad was probably referred to as Salomons or Chapples.) Her parents had a relaxed attitude about school. They never "sent" their children to school. When the weather was bad they stayed home. Esther said she always went when she could. This was the fun time of her childhood. But after a while Agnes didn't go she felt she was too big. There were about 28 pupils in grades one to eight. Esther and Marie Collins were the first to graduate and the only ones to graduate for some years. They had to go to Fort Benton to take the graduation exam.

At school her friends were May, John, Nelly and Dick Chapple. The Collins: Marie, Nora, Irene, Willie and Fredline. Grover Wolff, The Papans (children of the midwife) a Ely girl, Jim Long, Jim Ogle, Frank Sterrling, Knute, and Joe Jinkerson a nephew of Mrs Chapple.

The Summer of 1906

When grandpa Mose said his good-byes, before leaving for Kendell in the spring of 1906, he said to the girls, "I have a feeling I won't be seeing you again." Esther remembers looking in his eyes as they stood together by his wagon. His light almost transparent blue eyes seemed to be constantly darting here and there, as though he was looking far off into the hills or scanning the horizon ever on the look-out for any danger that might be lurking there. She remembered sometimes at night Moses would call out in his sleep, "There coming! They are coming!" and he would search frantically for the gun he once had to keep under his pillow. Zack would shake him awake saying, "Mose, Mose, wake up! it's just a dream you are having."

The summer started out as a very good year. There was an abundance of baby chicks, ducks, geese, and turkeys. The garden was in and coming up well. Zack was way off in the middle of the state some place working for the spring roundup. Before he left, he had hauled in lumber for a new kitchen he planned to add on to the house. Then in June it started to rain, day after day for days and days. The rivers began to over flow. The dam at Helena broke and the Missouri river backed up into the Marias and Teton. The lumber had been stacked on the lower side of the hill. As the water got higher Emma who was six months pregnant, began to worry about the lumber and went out with Agnes and the boys to move it higher up on the hill. Esther was left in charge of the baby, 2-year-old Ed. When the water got near the house, she pushed Ed in the buggy over the ruts and stones in the rain softened muddy earth up the hill to tell her mother. Emma couldn't believe her and sent one of the boys back to see. He came running back shouting that the water was already in the house and rising fast. They all hurried down to the house, backed the wagon up to the kitchen door, and with everyone's help grabbed everything they could carry, including tent, blankets, food, and staples from the store room. When the wagon had all it could hold, the horses were harnessed and hitched. Now they had to go through the water around the garden and up to the top of the hill, then hurry back for the livestock. Esther remembers trying to save the young chicks and ducks by gathering them up in a tub. The water was coming in the chicken coops and the chicks were beginning to float away.

ESTHER LARSEN EASTLUND

From their spot on the hill they saw the lumber floating away and many animals and things came washing down the river. Toward evening the chickens wanted to go back to their roost and one by one would fly off and drown. Every time a hen would take wing and fly off squawking, Emma would say, "You crazy old hen!".

A day or two later after the news of the flood reached Zack, he with a couple of friends came home. But there was no place where they could cross the swollen river. He called to them but answers could not be heard at that distance above the roar of the water rushing through the tree tops. Zack was about to jump in and try to swim across, but his friends held him back. Emma had the children line up in a row so he could count them and know they were all safe. At that time there was Agnes 15, Esther 13, Big 11, Little 10 And Ed 2 1/2. In a few days Zack was able to cross over at a bridge further down the river.

While they were camping out waiting for the water to recede a neighbor, Mrs. Southerland, who lived up over the hill, came to get some feed grain for her animals as her grain was all under water and the animals were starving. Big had to wade through water up to his arm pits to get the sacks of grain out of the barn.

When they were able to go down to the house they found a foot of mud on the floors. They continued to live in the tent until the house was cleaned and dried out. The water had come up to just under the grand piano. All the animals they couldn't take with them were gone. Before, the woods and coolies had been so full of domestic rabbits; black rabbits, white rabbits, and spotted black and white rabbits, that were offsprings of a pair that were once family pets.

Years later Esther would kid Eric about being the cause of the Larsen's home being flooded. That was when she learned that one of Eric's first construction jobs was with a crew hired to do the steel work at the dam in Helena. The same dam broke out again some years later.

In August a telegram came from Kendell that Moses was sick. Emma and Zack went to be with him in his final days. Esther and Agnes were left in charge of the boys. Ed ate too many choke cherries and got sick. They went to the neighbor Mrs. Chapple for help as Ed was having convulsions. She sent a telegram to Kendell and gave him a physic. Emma rushed home and did not get to stay for the funeral or see her father buried. Ed was better by the time she got home. Zack stayed and took care of the funeral and Moses possessions. He looked all over for the diamond cuff links that Moses had received as a gift from his sister. But never found them. During the recent winters Moses had spent with his daughter's family the children got to know him very well. Esther says, "Truly a nicer grandfather never lived." Moses died 27 Aug. 1906.

From the Ft. Benton River Press on September 5, 1906.

The family of Zack Larsen had a narrow escape from serious injury yesterday, While leaving their home on the Marias for the town. The team took fright and ran away, with Mr. Larsen following them on horseback. Mrs. Larsen was thrown from the wagon, the wheels passing over her, and the frantic team finally ran against a big tree with such force that the wagon was broken to pieces, the six children occupying it being hurled in all directions. None of the little ones occupying it being seriously hurt but five ducks that

ESTHER LARSEN EASTLUND

were being brought along in a crate were all killed.

Esther's memory of this is that she jumped out of the wagon and running alongside of it pleaded for them to hand her the baby. The other children were being bounced around in the bottom of the wagon and couldn't do anything. Emma was pulled from the wagon when the horses and wagon separated. She suffered from swollen legs where the wagon had gone over them. Esther was sent to town for medicine. The family had been on their way to a funeral for a young boy who had eaten too many green bananas. Esther said she had been fishing, and caught 7 large gold eyes which were wrapped in a wet gunny sack for a contribution to the meal the mourners would share. Two and a half weeks later (on September 23, 1906) Emma gave birth to her tenth child, Matildia Bell. Tillie, as she is now called, is the only other member of this family living today. (May 1990.)

Home life

Country life in Montana during Esther's childhood years was quite rugged as compared to life today. There was no electricity in their home. Candles or kerosine lamps furnished their night light. All the water had to be pumped by hand at the well or fetched from the river, then carried in and carried out. Water was heated in the big copper boilers on the black cast iron cooking stove for washing and bathing. Esther remembers the winter Saturday nights when Zack was home Emma would bring in the big galvanized tub. Set it in the kitchen near the stove and give the young children a bath. Each in turn was bundled up and given to Zack sitting in the rocking chair. He would rock and sing to each child then carry them off to bed when the next child was ready.

Zack for all the tough fighting reputation he had in his younger years had a tender side and at times was even chicken hearted. Once a flock of geese were flying over in their usual V formation. Zack grabbed his gun from the rack above the door and shot a gander. When it fell to the ground the drake dropped out of formation and came back looking for his mate. He flew around and around the house for the longest time honking and honking for his mate. Zack felt so sorry he said he would never again kill a goose in the spring. He could not eat any of it when it was prepared for dinner.

In the winter Zack would get home a good supply of fire wood, do the hunting and butchering. He also looked after the cattle that ran loose on the prairie. He had to see if they had enough to eat and often had to chop holes in the ice so they would have water. In the spring he would usually get the fields plowed and planted before he had to leave for his summer work as cook for the roundup. In the fall they would buy their staples. All the other chores were up to Emma. In addition to the house work and caring for the children, she did the gardening, butchering, milking, preserving, canning, the bread baking, and all those chores involved in taking care of the animals. They always had pigs, chickens, geese, turkeys, two or three cows two saddle horses and a team. She was very ingenious. Once she made a fish net and strung it across the river to catch fish. When bullberries were ripe Emma would put a canvas on the ground, cut a berry branch and with a stick hit the branch so the berries would fall onto the canvas. Bullberries made a very good jelly because they were so tart. When the children got bigger she assigned them to specific tasks.

ESTHER LARSEN EASTLUND

Agnes helped with the cooking, milking, house work and dish washing. Esther took care of the little ones, some of the cleaning, cake baking, and dish wiping. The boys looked after (and looked for) the horses and cows and also chopped wood. Emma had a sense of humor. She did unusual things like cutting teeth out of orange peel and put it in her mouth just to make the children laugh. Or she would draw pictures (she was really very artistic). She drew outlandishly silly animals, with horns on their backs and warts on their legs. She would make little booklets of these animals for each child with a blank page opposite so they could write their own stories. She sang songs and told stories. She was a loving mother.

The children got into their own kind of trouble when the folks were away. One time they took a spool of thread and unrolled it just to see how long 50 yards is. They intended to rewind it but heard their folks coming home and had to throw it away. Esther's brothers did a lot of teasing. They were bigger and stronger, and could do many things she couldn't, but she did not like to admit it, so she played their rough games. Sometimes they would call her to join them in sliding on the river ice, but not tell her if she came straight to them she would fall through the thin ice. Another time the boys were playing with the guns. Big pointed his 22 rifle around the corner of the house and fired just as Esther came around the corner. He was so frightened because he could have killed her. Esther had boy friends since she was 5 years old. Dick Chapple made her some doll furniture and another boy broke it up saying he would make her a better one, but he never did.

The earliest Christmas Esther can remember was the time they spent with their nearest neighbors the Chapple's. The Chapple's had a Christmas tree, something very rare in that country. The tree was decorated with candy and it was beautiful. They stayed overnight and all the children slept in the same bed. The nicest part was that they could reach the candy on the tree without getting out of bed. That was the only time they had a tree, but they always had a Christmas dinner. Grandfather Solomon often brought a wooden bucket of candy. The candies had shapes, some were like violins or animals and there were a few chocolates which were the favorites.

Once when Zack was expected home by train the family heard a train go by, and then they heard a very loud explosion. They thought Zack could be riding that train so they all ran to see. The train carrying a large amount of dynamite had collided with another train. It was the train Zack had just got off a few minutes before. The explosion knocked him to the ground. The train was also carrying a lot of steel spoons, cups and other utensils. Years later some of these utensils could be found for miles around. The blast made a large hole in the side of the big hill between Larsen's home and the rail road tracks. When it rained the hole would fill with water and then the children would take the horses swimming in this water hole.

Moses was given a piano. It was said to be the first, (but maybe more truthfully one of the first) to come into Montana by boat up the Missouri river. Esther took a few piano lessons and learned a few songs and cords which she never forgot. "I love coffee, I love tea." " Red Wing" to name a few. She also learned to play a few tunes by ear on the violin.

Religion

I often wondered how Esther managed to grow up to be so good and so well versed in bible

ESTHER LARSEN EASTLUND

knowledge when she lived in a country without a single church or synagogue. Her grandfather had a great influence upon her young life. He had the usual Hebrew education as well as public schooling in Germany, before he came to America at age sixteen. In 1850 in Peoria, Illinois, he was counted among the twelve Jewish men needed to establish a Jewish congregation. However, he left Peoria in 1852. That was probably the end of his association with organized religion. He married his Gros Venture wife in the Indian manor. Emma, his daughter lived with her mother's people part of the time during her young childhood, and they kept in touch through the years, but it is hard to say if any of the Indian beliefs influenced her life. However, she had a quality of respect for others that was passed on to her children. Such as; the value placed on working for the good of all, rather than personal gain, sharing in each other's "time to shine" without envy or jealousy, a quiet nature, and denying oneself for another. Other people influenced her life when she attended the St. Mary's Mission school. Zack growing up in Norway had first a Lutheran education before his family became Mormons. He too left family and church at an early age.

Everyone in the community attended the tent churches, and other gatherings, when the Christian Missionaries came to their area. Brother Van was one of the Missionaries Esther heard from time to time. She first met him while attending school at Ft. Shaw. He was a young vigorous Methodist lay preacher from Pennsylvania who first came to Montana in 1872 to establish a Mission among the Blackfeet. He quickly made friends with the Indians who came to know him as "Big Heart", but he soon realized that he could make little progress among them until the morals of some of their white neighbors improved. So William Wesley Van Orsdel, or "Brother Van" as he became widely known in Montana, devoted the rest of his life to founding churches and preaching interracial understanding. The last time Esther saw him was at the railroad depot in 1916. I was the baby in her arms then.

One winter the family moved to town as Zack had a job there. That was the year they all got baptized. The house where the rite was performed was so small that, they all could not get into the same room and, some of them had to stand in the doorway.

Esther went to high school in Fort Benton. She lived with a Minister's family, Rev. Donaldson, and worked for her board and room. One of her jobs was to get up early and get the young children ready for school. Rev. Donaldson gave her a bible which she still has. It was at a party, while on the Christmas vacation in Loma, that she first met Eric Eastlund and did not return to school.