

A NEW MEXICO FISHING TRIP, 1886
From *My Life on the Frontier 1882-1897*
Governor Miguel Antonio Otero

On July 26, 1886, Henry Dodd, Harry J. O'Bryan, and I went over to Santa Fe in company with Mrs. H. W. Kirchner and the beautiful Miss Lucie Boisliniere, of St. Louis, Missouri. The party spent Sunday in Santa Fe and returned the following day to Las Vegas, accompanied by Mr. Kirchner and Mr. Louis Tetard. Three weeks later my brother, Page, and I arranged a most delightful party for a fishing trip on the Pecos River, at the old mining camp at Hamilton. Mrs. H. W. Kirchner was the chaperone. The young ladies were Miss Emily Tetard, Miss Emma Dale Bradsby, and Miss Lucie Boisliniere. Mrs. Kirchner proved to be a most charming chaperone; she, very properly, took charge of all of the liquor in the commissary but handled it with both care and liberality. One evening I came into camp, wet to the skin, having fallen into the river. Mrs. Kirchner ordered that the wet clothes be taken off immediately, that I wipe myself dry, and that I rub whiskey all over me, giving me a tin cup full of whiskey for that purpose. I took it, but failed to carry out her instructions for rubbing.

Our camp was a frame house having four rooms and a good-sized kitchen. It was one of the mining company's houses; there was a yard running back to the river, and on the northwest corner, an adobe stable where we kept our horses. We had borrowed Henry Dodd's carriage and thoroughbred team of horses for the ladies. The team was a beautiful pair of sorrels, fine trotters, and had never been ridden by anyone. Dodd bought them in Kansas City, paying two thousand dollars for the pair, and they were well worth it. Mrs. Kirchner started in on house cleaning, and by supper time all of the rooms were as clean as a new pin. We chopped down a couple of small pine trees and stripped off the evergreen leaves, which we carried to the rooms for the beds. We placed them about two feet thick on the floor and then covered them with a canvas wagon sheet; they made excellent spring mattresses.

After everything was in place we started to fish. My brother, Page, was quite a fisherman and hunter, and the camp was always supplied with fish, venison, turkey, and grouse.

We were having a most enjoyable time and good weather, until the last week in August when one of the worst storms I had ever seen took place on the upper Pecos; the lightning and thunder were terrific and the roaring of the river was certainly alarming. It was past midnight, but soon the water began flooding the rooms and we all got up and dressed. Our house was about two feet above the ground and the water was running under it and over the flooring in the rooms. I remembered that I had seen Pete Powers come in from the north that evening and camp in one of the empty houses just north of our camp. I was very uneasy about our horses in the adobe stable, realizing that large timbers or even a pine tree might be floating down that swift running stream and hit the stable, which would mean total destruction and the drowning of our fine team of horses. I looked over toward the house where Powers had camped and saw a light in a window, so I rushed over there and found him just in the act of coming over to our camp as he was worried about the women. I asked him to accompany me to the stable, which he did. We found those thoroughbred horses very uneasy and neighing loudly, apparently using their only means of communication in an effort to get help.

It was wonderful to see those animals when we entered the stable; they seemed instinctively to know we had come to assist them out of a serious predicament. We quickly undid the halter straps, and the team followed us out like human beings. They did everything but speak. We took them to the front of the house where we met my brother, Page, who had a long rope and had been looking for the best place to cross to higher ground.

My brother was a powerful man, standing six feet in his stockings, and a perfect athlete. He tied one end of the rope around my body, under my arms, and held the other end secure. We walked through about three feet of running water to a point between the three springs and where Willow Creek entered the Pecos River, just east of our house. The center of this drain was about five feet deep, but quite narrow, possibly fifteen feet, so we decided to make the attempt. Miss Lucie Boisliniere courageously insisted that she be the first to make the trial. Powers was riding one of the carriage horses bareback with only the halter, and from the front door Lucie Boisliniere jumped up behind him. It was perfectly marvelous the way those horses acted their part; they obeyed every demand made on them without the slightest objection. I took my stand just below where the crossing was to be made, ready to jump out and catch the young lady should she be swept from the horse, while my big brother, at the other end of the rope, would pull us into shallow water. We were working fast, for it was still raining and the thunder and lightning were fierce. Pete with Lucie, and an intelligent horse, made a splendid crossing. Miss Bradsby made the second crossing; then Mrs. Kirchner, and finally Miss Tetard. It was a great relief to see those women all safe on higher ground. I mounted the other horse and the two of us made several trips until all our bedding and provisions were over.

On the north side of Willow Creek was a log cabin with two large rooms and a kitchen, and we promptly took possession of it. It was now getting to be daylight, and we were able to see the dangers we had escaped. Our other team was hitched to the wagon on the south side of the house, so was out of immediate peril. When the sun came out, the flood was subsiding and my brother walked back to the house, hitched the team to the wagon, gathered up odds and ends, and drove back to our log cabin. Pete Powers, who was such a help to us, moved his outfit over and made a camp near us.

All the bridges on the Pecos had been washed away, and we were on the wrong side of the river to get into communication with people. Wild rumors had been sent to Las Vegas, and hundreds left in all kinds of conveyances to assist in our rescue. My brother, Page, knew where an English family had a ranch up in the mountains east of us, so he walked there with Mr. Nelse N. Newell and they soon returned with a half a deer, just killed.

In the afternoon, we walked down to the river and encountered many people on the opposite side who were anxious about our safety. We chopped down a large pine tree, hoping that when it fell it might afford a foot bridge, but as soon as it struck the stream, it was carried away like a match. Finally, the men on the west side succeeded in getting a long rope across to us, which we wound around a tree, throwing the end back to them, thus making an endless chain. A basket containing butter and eggs was tied to the rope and pulled over; in this manner we secured bread and all kinds of food. We had named our new home Camp Dismal, for we were doomed to stay there for several days, perhaps weeks, should the floods continue. The next day Louis C. Tetard, brother of Mrs. Kirchner and Miss Tetard, and Harry W. Kelly and Mrs. Kelly and many others appeared on the scene, but there was no means of crossing.

Now that we had procured food, we simply settled down for a good time. Nelse Newell and Ned Gross arrived at the old camp just before the washout and, of course, we had to take care of them, but they rendered very valuable services. Ned Gross took his shotgun and walked to the top of the divide where he succeeded in killing six fine grouse and a turkey almost as large as himself. These were added to our larder, together with a basket of fine speckled trout brought in by my brother Page, who, besides being a good fisherman, was quite a musician and had a delightful baritone voice. Miss Tetard, likewise, had a beautiful voice and as my brother had brought his guitar, we enjoyed many duets from the two principals, some solos, and good choruses from the entire party. We played cards, told stories, and in such manner enjoyed every moment. Take it all in all, we had the most delightful fishing and hunting trip ever pulled

off in New Mexico. We were unable to leave Camp Dismal for two weeks, and when we did, it was with sincere regret.

When we reached Las Vegas, our friends gave us a beautiful dance at the Hot Springs, which lasted all night, and we never tired of telling about our experiences at Camp Dismal, the night we swam the river on horseback, and the manner of procuring our food from the opposite side of the Pecos River. We did not forget to mention the kindness of Pete Powers, of Glorieta, who rendered us such valuable and whole-hearted assistance on the night of the flood, and also the wonderful manner in which our horses behaved throughout the rescue.



Camp Dismal, August, 1886

Standing: Miss Lucie Boisliniere, Page B. Otero; Sitting, left to right: Miss Emma Dale Bradsby, Miss Emily Tetard, The Author, Mrs. H. W. Kirchner