

Jesse Johnson Andrews: 1887 – 1942

by John Andrews

Jesse Johnson Andrews was born to **Douglas A. Andrews** and **Emma L. (Gans) Andrews** on July 15, 1878 in Olathe, Kansas. He was the third of three male children born to Douglas and Emma.¹

The 1870 census shows **Benj F. Robinson**, age 20, black, born in Missouri, as a domestic servant living in the William and Anna Gans household. William and Anna were the parents of Emma Andrews. Family history says that after the Civil War a discharged Union veteran Benjamin Robinson, later known as “Uncle Ben” came to the Gans home asking to work for food. William Gans, a Christian Minister, gave Benjamin some work to perform, he was fed and he spent that night in the family’s barn. He stayed the next day, worked and again slept in the barn. This continued until he simply became a part of the Gans household. Sometime after 1880, Uncle Ben left William and Anna and moved into the Douglas and Emma (Gans) Andrews’s household. He helped raise Howard and Jesse. Later, when Emma died or when she and Douglas were separated, Uncle Ben remained with Douglas, Howard and Jesse until Jesse Married Nora Wiswell. Uncle Ben then became a member of their household. After Nora’s death in 1918, Benjamin helped Jesse raise his children and then continued to live with Jesse until his death in Brighton, Colorado in 1934 at the age of 103 years, 8 months.

The 1880 census taken in Olathe, Kansas, contained the following information: Jesse’s father, Douglas, was 26 years of age; his mother, Emma, was 23; his brother, Frank, was 4; and Jesse was 1½ years old. They were all living in the Burns and Oak Trees Addition in Olathe. Douglas’ occupation was laborer and Emma was a “house keeper”. According to that same census Jesse’s grandparents, **Ray W.** and **Mary Andrews** and their son, **Colonel C. Andrews**, lived nearby. Ray was living alone in Olathe while Mary and Colonel were living together on Park Street in the Hays Addition of Olathe. Ray and Mary, Douglas’ parents, had separated.

No information has been located which would shed light on Jesse’s early life. Even the sterile information a census provides is missing due to a major fire in a federal building that destroyed the entire 1890 census records. Jesse’s brother Frank is never mentioned and no information has been found after the 1880 census.

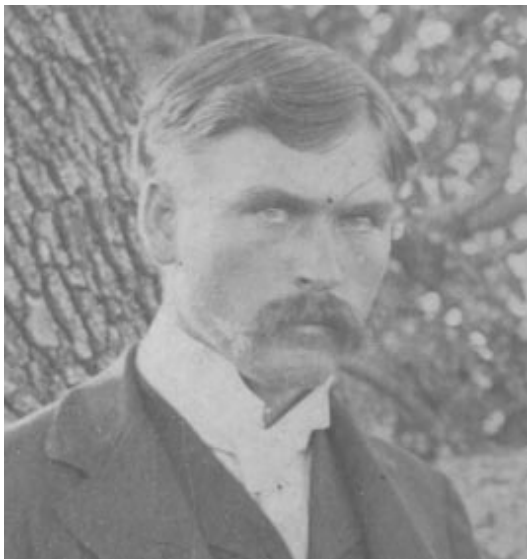
A compilation of letters titled “Distant Devotions” contains insightful information about one period of Jesse’s life. Ramona Bracht, Jesse’s granddaughter, prepared the compilation. “Distant Devotions” primarily contains transcribed handwritten letters exchanged between Jesse and his fiancée, Nora Wiswell. The letters were written between August of 1899 and December of 1900. Several letters written to the couple by Douglas, some friends of Jesse and one letter from one of Jesse’s employment supervisors is also contained in the compilation.

On June 24, Jesse wrote “I am sorry to say but I guess they have separated for good. Mother is in Topeka in a military store.” Earlier, when Nora asked Jesse if he thought his mother would like her (Nora), he answered (on Sept 24, 1899) “a question hard to answer as I was a child when she seen me last, but hope she will be pleased as well as Pa.”

¹ **Frank Andrews** was born about 1876 in Kansas and **Howard Andrews** was also born in Kansas in March of 1883.

One letter contained in “Distant Devotions” reveals that early in his life, Jesse lived in California and worked at least for a short time for the Santa Fe Rail Road. The letter written on July 5, 1898, by the San Bernardino, California, Santa Fe Rail Road Yard Foreman informs Jesse that he has been laid off “on account of light business.” He is encouraged to leave his address with the yard foreman so he can be rehired when business improves.

Sometime in 1899 Jesse met and fell in love with his future wife, Nora Wiswell. This life changing event occurred in Texas, where Jesse, his father, Douglas, brother, Howard, and “Uncle Ben” Robinson had traveled to participate in a family gathering.² While members of the Andrews and Wiswell families camped and fished in the piney woods of San Jacinto County, Texas, Jesse and his cousin, Nora developed a strong attraction to each other. That attraction turned to love and Jesse proposed marriage. Nora accepted. Several factors kept the couple from informing the rest of their family of their plans. To begin with, Jesse was unemployed and it was his strong desire to have a job and some money in savings before they were married.



Jesse Johnson Andrews

Fear that Nora’s family might be opposed to the marriage was another reason the couple kept their plans secret. Nora’s father (Daniel Frederick Wiswell) was a brother to Jesse’s grandmother (Mary Wiswell Andrews wife of Raymond W. Andrews) making Jesse and Nora distant cousins. Several letters exchanged by the couple explore the possible family reactions. Their fears were dispelled when Nora’s family was finally informed. Nora wrote Jesse the “good news” that her family was delighted with the pending marriage and the fact they were cousins does not appear to have been a concern to anyone.

Between the time of the family gathering in the piney woods of Texas and the marriage Jesse traveled all over the country searching for work. Correspondence between Nora and Jesse reveals that his father, brother, and Uncle Ben accompanied him on this difficult adventure. The travels took the group to various Texas cities with a team and wagon, including Fort Worth, Gainesville, Temple, and Dennison. While in Dennison, Jesse wrote:

“We are camped under some trees near town and rustle every day and shall keep up the licks until we win. But oh we are tired of Gipsy life and long for the day that we may get into a house and live once more like deacent people.”

When those efforts proved unsuccessful the men continued their travels by “team and wagon” to Guthrie, Oklahoma. The groups living conditions did not improve. The men entered each community unemployed, with no permanent ties, no personal contacts and very little money. They were living in tents and fishing provided one source of food.

² Information on Douglas A. Andrews and Benjamin Franklin Robinson are contained in their individual profiles in this collection of family histories.

At one point Douglas left the group and traveled to Kansas City, Missouri, where his brother, Colonel C. Andrews, owned and operated a successful grain company. Douglas was taken by the positive employment prospects in that area and he wrote Jesse, Howard and Ben urging them to drop everything immediately and make their way to Kansas City. He wrote:

“... Don't buy anything but a pair of shoes and I will meet you at the train and take you to the barber and clothier and hatter.... This is a hell of a good city and think if we do not all find work here it can not be found on earth. ...Guard your money...we will yet win...keep a stiff upper lip and the camp life will end soon.”

When the group arrives they took up residence in a two room house on the same lot with Uncle Curn (Colonel C. Andrews) and his wife Hattie. Douglas found employment with a Little Rock grain company. Soon Jesse went to work part time at a grain elevator. Then he obtained employment at a freight depot earning \$1.50 an hour. Working six days a week he was earning \$36 a month. Finally he was hired by the C. G. W.R. Rail Road as a check clerk three days a week and a laborer in the freight house the other days. In February of 1899 the group moved across town to an inexpensive house located at 3127 Cherry Street.

Throughout this time Nora's letters contain strong expressions of her desire to get married as soon as possible. She owned property near Evant, Texas; property given to her from her mother's estate. She and members of her extended family wanted Jesse and Nora to settle on that land and farm. Jesse's response was never positive. He wrote Nora that he had distrust in the potential of farming in Texas. His trust was in cattle. He wanted to earn enough money to purchase a herd of cattle and he felt that approach to ranching would assure the couple's future success. From that perspective Jesse urged Nora to rent her property. He promised to send for her as soon as he had the funds to cover her train transportation. They could marry when all that was arranged. Nora was not pleased with that idea. The fact she had never traveled alone was frightening and who could guess how long all the arrangements might take.

Finally, Nora took Jesse's advice. She rented her land to her brother, Philip in June of 1900. That decision led to some major changes in Nora's family. When her brother Philip and his family prepared to move onto the rented property Nora's father and brother, Frank were forced to move in with her brother, Emmet and his family. In addition to all that, Nora had to move in with her sister, Oshea and her family. Later she would move in with her sister, Lillian, and her family. One can only surmise the stress all this placed on the Wiswell families. Nora wrote Jesse that she had rented her property for only one year. She added the fact she didn't feel her brother was taking good care of it.

In August of 1900 Jesse wrote Nora a difficult letter. He wrote:

“...Now pet I guess I will not be able to take the ranch this year for I will not have enough money to buy the things we would need to start farming so I think you had better rent it for another year and perhaps by that time we can go on it in the right way. If we went to farming now we would have to go in debt for every thing we got to start on, and I am afraid of that, for it would take a life time to get even again. So I think it best to go to some good town where I can get work and stay there until we can save enough

to start in farming in the right way and have everything payed for not to worry about debts all the time.

...I am very sorry sweetheart that I am not able to keep my promise of taking the ranch next year...

...We are working 11 to 12 hours a day now and have for some time but that will end when the wheat rush is over and it cant come to soon to suit me..."

Jesse had said he hoped to save \$500 to be able to buy cattle to start a heard on their land. But on September 16 he wrote Nora, saying he may only come back to Texas with \$100 or less.

Jesse did return to Texas in November and he and Nora were married on November 17, 1900 by Rev. W. N. White, O.M.G. The marriage took place in Evant, Texas.

Marriage did not change Jesse's determination to earn and save the money he felt they needed to successfully begin a farm of their own. According to a letter dated December 2, 1900, Jesse, accompanied by at least his father, Douglas, had traveled by way of Waco to San Antonio, Texas. Jesse was sure San Antonio held good prospects for employment and he was going to send for Nora as soon as he obtained a job. He wrote:

"Well sweetheart we have been rustling all day for a situation but have not found anything yet but will not give up as long as there is any hopes. I cut out of a paper several advertisements of land and will send them to you to look at. And pet I think it advisable for you to sell your land at \$6.00 per acre as soon as possible. I think that you can get that from Mr. Haskins and if he will give you \$1620.00 cash for your place take it (and you can buy that 320 acres or the 640 acres and we cam go on it yet this year and put in a crop next) Now sweetheart if you want to do this go and see Mr Haskins and let me know what he will do in your letter."

San Antonio proved to be no better than any other town Jesse had visited; so he and his father traveled on to Galveston, Temple and then to Houston, Texas. He wrote Nora on December 13, 1900...

"Well dear I received your letter on the 11th of the month and postponed ans. so I could write better news but as it is I am afraid it is worse now than it was two days ago. Now dear we are sure enough on the bum and jolly bums are we. Now Nora if you or Phillip has not rented the house or promised it in such a way that you can not get around letting it go, don't rent it and we will come back and go to clearing off that bottom and put in a crop for the next year but if there has been any arrangements made to rent it let it go."

Apparently the land was available because Jesse did return. He and Nora began raising crops and livestock. They successfully farmed Nora's land from 1901 to 1911.

They were also involved in numerous land transactions beginning in December of 1901 when they sold a small piece of Nora's land to her brother-in-law, P. Z. Stevens.³ Then in March of 1907 they sold 252 ½ acres of land to a Mr. D. F. Francis.⁴ Three months later they purchased 160 acres of land in Coryell County, Texas, from a Mrs. M. E. Jordan.⁵



This shows the family harvesting corn on their Roswell homestead. From left, Benjamin Robinson, Nora Andrews, Hazel, Colonel Douglas and Frederick, Jesse Andrews.

³ On December 27, 1901, J. J. Andrews and N. B. Andrews sold 17 acres of land, more or less, to P. Z. Stevens for \$85. The land was in the Scurlock Survey of Coryell County, Texas. The land abutted land already owned by P. Z. Stevens. Philip Stevens was married to Nora Andrews' sister, Oshea.

The Scurlock Survey was in an area along both sides of U. S. 84 west of Gatesville and just east of Evant, Texas. It was located between Ohio, Hamilton County, and Pearl, Coryell County. Lillian Griggs lived at Ohio; Shea Stevens lived near the Scurlock Survey. Leonidas Wiswell, Nora's brother, owned land in Pearl. Daniel F. Wiswell, Nora's father, and Oshea Stevens, Nora's sister, are both buried in the cemetery at Pearl, Texas.

⁴ On March 18, 1907, J. J. Andrews and Nora Andrews sold 252 ½ acres of land to D. F. Francis for \$1,500. The land was part of the 269 ½ originally owned by Jesse **Error! Bookmark not defined.** and Nora, 17 acres of which had been sold to P. Z. Stevens in 1901.

⁵ On July 5, 1907, J. J. Andrews bought 160 acres of land from Mrs. M. E. Jordan of Coryell County for \$2,700 to be paid with \$500 cash and assuming 11 promissory notes dated August 26, 1905, each for \$200, bearing interest at the rate of 10% and falling due January 1, 1907, 1908, 1909, 1910, 1911, 1912, 1913, 1914, 1915, 1916, and 1917. The land was on Cow House Creek about 21 miles from Gatesville on highway 84. The land was first described in the John W. Howard survey of April 1, 1876, recorded in No. 103, Vol.7.

In November of 1910 they sold 160 acres of land to T. A. Sawyer.⁶ And six months later they recorded another sale to the same person.⁷

In the midst of all these land transactions the family continued to raise crops and care for livestock. They also began their own family. The first child born to Jesse and Nora was Frederick Raymond Andrews, born on January 30, 1902. Three years later on November 16, 1905, a second child, Hazel Oshea Andrews was born. On August 2, 1908, a third child was born. That child was either a still birth or died shortly after childbirth.

The only records of the birth were found in the Coryell County Clerk's office. Neither the child's gender nor the place of burial was recorded. On July 5, 1909, Nora gave birth of a fourth child, Colonel Douglas Andrews, at Evant, Texas. Finally, Nora gave birth to a baby girl on February 28, 1911 at Oglesby, Texas. That child was either a still birth or died shortly after birth.

In 1911, Jesse and Nora, their three children, Uncle Ben, and Nora's brother Frank left Coryell County, Texas, and moved to Roswell New Mexico to seek homestead land. When Jesse's father, Douglas Andrews, first learned of these plans, he wrote and strongly urged his son and daughter-in-law to reconsider. He painted a dismal picture of what he thought the family would face, but Jesse and Nora weren't persuaded. They loaded their property into a horse drawn wagon and made the long, difficult trip with Frank and Uncle Ben following in a horse drawn buggy.⁸

After reaching Roswell they located land approximately fifty miles north and west of the town. Jesse, Frank and Uncle Ben each claimed a homestead on different portions of adjoining land.⁹ Since ownership of a homestead depended upon one making their home on the land as well as adding improvements, they each immediately went to work. The water table was too deep to dig a well, so they dug deep holes, sealed them with clay and strapped a large metal tank to the bed of a wagon to haul water from the closest well. Any trip near a working well was never complete until the metal tank was filled with fresh water. Once they addressed their water needs, they each built a small house, planted gardens and began raising some livestock.

⁶ November 21, 1910, J. J. Andrews and Nora Andrews sold 160 acres of the John W. Howard Survey to T. A. Sawyer. Sawyer was to pay \$1,500 on January 1, 1911. They sold the \$1,500 note to the United States Bond and Mortgage Company for \$1,500.

⁷ May 10, 1911, J. J. Andrews and Nora Andrews of Hamilton County, Texas, recorded the sale of land to T. A. Sawyer for \$3000. They were paid \$600 in cash and held four notes: \$1,500 due January 1911, \$400 due June 1911, \$300 due November 1911 and \$200 due November 1912. Interest on the notes was 10%. The Sawyer note was released on July 25, 1913.

⁸In September, 2003, Jesse's grandson, John J. Andrews and his wife, Carol, traveled to Roswell, New Mexico and located the land upon which Jesse and Nora homesteaded. The property contained very few trees, sparse short sage brush and no visible water. Land in the area was used to graze cattle. It was hard to imagine that anyone could ever make a living farming that arid barren land.

⁹ Government Land Office records show Jesse received Homestead Patent 532415 on 134.65 acres on June 7, 1916. He owned the north half of the sw $\frac{1}{4}$ and Lots 3 and 4 of Section 5 in Township 6 south of Range 21 East of the New Mexico Meridian. Frank Wiswell and Ben Robinson also had land in 21E. The application to begin the homestead was filed May 27, 1912.



Homestead families gathered in front of the one-room school house. Jesse and Nora are to the extreme left of the second row of people. Hazel is the second person from the left in the front row. She is standing next to the woman holding a baby. Colonel Douglas is the third person from the right in the front row, and Frederick is the last person on the right in the front row. Jesse helped build this school house

As more and more people took up homesteads, a sense of community developed. The neighbors formed a cooperative and built a one room school and a small dwelling nearby as a residence for the school teacher. Nora's three children received their early academic education in that one-room-school.

According to Whitmore family history Frank proved his claim and then he sold his land to Jesse and returned to Texas. The record of that sale was not located in Roswell. Ben and Jesse also proved their claim. They continued on their ranch, working together after Frank left.

In 1917 Nora was seriously injured in an accident. She had taken the horse-drawn wagon to fill its tank with water. After loading the water she picked up Colonel Douglas after school and the two of them began the trip back to the homestead. A short distance from the school they encountered some children playing with fireworks. The loud sounds frightened the two horses pulling the wagon, they bolted and Nora dropped the reins. She yelled for Colonel to grab the straps that held the tank to the wagon, and then she knelt on the wagon floor in front of the seat and tried to grab the reins. The rough ride caused her to lose her balance; she fell forward between the horses and the wagon and was run over by the wheels.

The school teacher witnessed the event as it unfolded. He jumped on his own horse, chased the runaway wagon and was able to stop the team before the wagon overturned. Colonel was frightened, but otherwise uninjured. Men were summoned to help lift her into another horse-drawn wagon and she was taken to the homestead where Jesse and Ben cared for her.

Nora never fully recovered from the injuries she sustained. A medical doctor urged the family to move to a different climate, telling the family that the change might help Nora heal from her injuries. That advice and Nora's seeming inability to fully recover led to the sale of the homestead in 1918.¹⁰

After sale of the homestead, according to Hazel Oshea Andrews Whitmore, Jesse, Nora, Uncle Ben and the children traveled to Oklahoma City, Oklahoma by railroad train where Jesse took custody of several train carloads of wild horses he had shipped in from New Mexico. The family obtained a Conestoga wagon and Jesse equipped it so Nora could lie down as they traveled. They would herd the horses from farm to farm and Jesse began supporting his family by buying, selling and trading horses.

Horse traders weren't considered the most reputable businessmen, and apparently Jesse was no exception. When Colonel Douglas would reminisce about the "horse trading days" he would tell how his father would use a water filled syringe to fill out the sunken places in an old horse's temple or use cosmetics to cover up a mare's grey hair. Those creative tactics enabled Jesse to ask a higher price for his older stock. Those tactics also explain the reason the family was always on the move.

In 1918 a flu epidemic swept the country. Nora was the only family member to contract the flu. Her compromised health and the severity of the influenza led to her death. She was buried in the cemetery near Kenefick, Oklahoma.

Her death must have been extremely difficult for Jesse. He not only lost Nora's companionship and love, he was left with the daunting responsibility of raising three children. Once again Uncle Ben stepped forward taking on much of Nora's tasks including care for the children.

According to Colonel Douglas's memory, the family lived in Prague, Oklahoma for approximately a year following his mother's death. Jesses' brother, Howard, joined the family. Jesse and Howard worked in several oil fields in Oklahoma and when they heard that a new oil refinery was to be built in Laramie, Wyoming, they packed up and the family moved west.

According to Colonel Douglas, when construction on the refinery was nearing completion his dad purchased a saloon. He closed the saloon and opened a restaurant in its place. He remembered that between the time the saloon was closed and the restaurant opened, his dad found several cases of champagne in the basement of the building. Before he opened the restaurant for business he threw a big party for his help and the champagne was put to good use. Jesse ran the restaurant for about one year.

Jesse and his family were living in a boarding house in Laramie during this time. Jesse met and made friends with the Vic Masser family who were also living in the same boarding house. Vic and Jesse decided they would open an automobile garage in Brighton. Jesse, Uncle Ben and the children moved to Brighton and lived in a house next door to the garage. Colonel and Fred helped their father with the business, and a Mr. George Whitmore was hired as a mechanic.

About one year after George Whitmore began working for Jesse his wife died leaving him with two children, Madeline and Charlie. In time George and Jesse's daughter, Hazel began to date.

¹⁰ Jesse and Nora sold their Homestead on February 11, 1918 to C. C. Martin for \$1,700.

On August 5, 1925 they were married. Business was poor, so George, Hazel and their children moved to Estes Park.

Jesse met and fell in love with Ruth Pearl (unknown maiden name), a woman who was much younger than he was. They were married in about 1924. The couple had one daughter, Nora Ruth, born about 1925. Jesse's children never fully accepted that marriage and it created tension in the family for many years.



By 1921-22, construction on the Laramie refinery was nearing completion. Jesse was offered the opportunity to purchase a combination auto battery shop and gas station in Brighton, Colorado. So, he, Uncle Ben and the three children moved again.

Jesse (center rear in vest) with second wife, Ruth, on the right, C. Douglas and Madeline on the left, daughter Nora in front of C. Douglas, Uncle Ben seated in center. Others are not identified.

In time the venture was moderately successful. Jesse entered into a business arrangement with Mr. George Whitmore, moved his business into an automobile repair facility, and Mr. Whitmore assumed responsibility for part of the business.

Mr. Whitmore, a single man with two children, Madeline and Charlie, fell in love with Jesse's daughter, Hazel, and they were married on August 5, 1925. Business was poor, so George, Hazel and their children left Brighton and moved to Estes Park, Colorado, leaving Jesse, Uncle Ben and the two boys in Brighton.