

REMEMBRANCES OF ALMO COMMUNITY
BY ELBERT L. DURFEE

I am not one of the earliest settlers of the Almo Valley but I am a descendant of one. I was born February 12th, 1906. My parents were Lorenzo Durfee and Anna Abby Bruesch Durfee, and grandparents Henry Dennison Durfee Sr. and Jane Isabel Barker, These Durfees came to settle here in 1879. John Jacob Bruesch and Hannah Belle Johnston, the Brueschs in 1902.

Many times I have looked over our valley and wondered just how it looked when the first settlers came into the valley. Listening to my grandparents and the other oldster talk it must have been somewhat different. There was very little sage brush then, rather there was an abundance of grass.

Accounts of pioneers who crossed the valley on the way to California, tell of marshes that were crossed; quite likely created by the warm springs later known as Durfee's Hot Spring. (Early Trails.) 3.

Many people crossed the valley on the trails to California and Oregon. Some of the travelers came into the Malta area via the Sublet cutoff thence up Raft River to the City of Rocks. Others turned south at the mouth of Raft River leaving the Oregon Trail and following Raft River on the way to California. Some of the early travelers followed Cassia Creek traveling through what is now Elba and Almo to the City of Rocks. After the Mormons had settled Salt Lake many travelers on their way to California or Oregon came through those northern Utah settlements around the north end of Salt Lake, crossing Curlew Valley and through the pass where Strevell was located, thence west to Raft River and the City of Rocks. Once they reached the City of Rocks they had to decide on California or Oregon. The trails forked here one going westward through Granite Pass to Goose Creek and on west to the Humboldt to California or northward down Birch Creek and the Oakley meadows to Oregon.

Two men, Shirley and Keogh brought cattle into the valley before settlers arrived. One of their employees, Johnny Stines, built the first cabin. It was located on the largest creek, later named Almo Creek. The cabin was located between the present homes (1991) of Elbert Durfee and James Sheridan. Mr. Stines dragged the logs from the "Almo Park" with an ox team. The canyon east of the park is still called Stines Canyon, and the trail out of the Park, is known as Stines drag road. My grandfather Henry Dennison Durfee bought Stines cabin and claim to the meadows here in the cove and moved his family here in 1879.

Thomas Owen King had come into the valley as a boy of 15 years, with others in search of some horses stolen by Indians from the Mormon settlers in Utah. He later rode through the area as a pony express rider. with his wife and four small children, he came into the valley in 1879 and stayed to manage the E.Y. Ranch in S 12 T 16S R 24E BM for Governor Emery of Utah. The first white child born in the valley was his daughter Helen Louise who married John C. Ward. Lacy Eugene Durfee was born a short time later to Myron Bushnel Durfee and Leron Cahoon Durfee. These children were born without the aid of a doctor.

There was a pony express station on the E.Y. Ranch. Remains are still visible at this time (1990) though the fire place has become a pile of rocks on the outside. Names are still visible on the inside rocks and mantel.

Myron B. Durfee made his home on the meadows in S 22 T 15S R 24E BM in 1878.

He operated the first mercantile establishment in the valley. The store building was just north west of the present home of Neil Durfee who lives on the Original M.B. Durfee claim. Jensen, Ward and Jones operated a store in the SE1/4 SE1/4 S 22 T 15S R 24E BM which was later moved to the old rock building. (The walls still standing 1991). This old building served as a store, a saloon and a school. Jensen and Brackenbury also kept a store at one time in the Brackenbury home. Eames and Tracy started a store in 1894 and it is still a family operation.

John Lowe, Charles Ward, Robert Wake, and Alfred Ward families came from Willard Utah and took land on the northeast side of the valley along another stream of water later named "Grape Creek" because of the abundance of wild grapes growing along its course.

During the early settlement of Almo there were three groups trying to make their particular settlement dominant; one was those on the Grape Creek, Joneses, Lowes, Wards, and Edwards, another, the Taylors, Durfees, and Johnstons. Then those settled at the present Almo town. Three schools were maintained for a time. There was some controversy over the naming of the town. Some thought it should be called Durfeeville since three Durfee brothers had been among the first to open up the settlement but it was decided to be Almo, meaning "Great Battle", because of the Indian and Emigrant battle that had taken place near the townsite, according to some, or the place of cotton woods according to others. John Lowe had built a small building on his property to be used as a cheese factory hoping to draw the town that way. Tracy and William Eames had established a store or mercantile in section 22 and with trade from the Vipont mine some eighteen to twenty miles west, pushed the favor for the present town site. Two saloons were set up. One built of grey stone on the corner west of the store and part is still standing. It served a store and school after the saloon venture.

A Mr. Jensen built a cabin on section 9 here in the cove and William Johnston built one just west on the same section. Grandfather Henry D. Durfee built a cabin on section 15 and James T. Taylor built on the section 15. These families came from Beaver Dam and Conner Springs Utah and were evidently acquainted with a Hoagland family who later came and settled on Lone Rock Creek in section 21 T. 15s. R. 24e BM. A family by the name of Graham took up some of section 20. William Jones and Thomas Edwards settled on the meadows created by the stream named "Edwards Creek", S. 13-14 T.15S R. 24E BM and the warm springs.

Thomas Owen King, who had ridden through the valley as a Pony express rider, and had come to the valley to manage the E.Y. Ranch, settled south of the Jones and Edwards claim. Vic Spencer settled on S. 25 T. 15S R. 24E BM. Very early, exact years not known, a Mr. Reid built a cabin on a large spring in the center of the valley. The spring emptied into the Raft River. It was named Reid Springs. Mr. Reid kept a band of horses here. A Whitaker family built a cabin on Raft River just under the bluff on section 12 T. 16S R. 24E BM. This land now owned by Bruce and Kent Durfee.

The David Hubbard family established in the northeast S.16 T. 16S R. 24E BM near the Raft River and later sold the property to John Ward. His family still owns this ranch. Before the turn of the century a number of other families had located here, and many of the sons of the original settlers began making homes.

A number of people came into the valley in 1880 to 1884. Some of these didn't stay long. The following did make homes here: Val Brackenbury, Henry, Robert and William Eames, C.V. Spencer, J.P. and Chris Hansen. William Miller, William Eberts, C.B. and George B. Spencer were here for a short time.

My father, Lorenzo Durfee and his brother-in-law Nathaniel Rice, bought the Hoagland claim, S 21 T 15 S R 24 E BM on Lone Rock Creek. His brother Henry D. Durfee Jr. made a home on (S 270). On September 18, 1901 Wallace Durfee married Eva Johnston. Wallace died December 10 of the same year. His wife bore them a daughter the following year. Later she married Albert Sheridan. Eva was given part of the original Henry D. Durfee place for her inheritance. A brief interlude here concerning the typhoid epidemic that was so devastating to the community. The settlers believed it's cause to be the large bands of sheep being grazed in the high country mountains. The land is layered close to the surface with granite making early wells hard to dig, most only 15 to 20 feet deep. At least that was one consensus. Whatever the cause many people lost their lives in this epidemic. Now on with the homebuilders.

John Hull bought the Tracy claim in the Circle (near the City of Rocks) then sold to Job Adams. His brother (John?) located in the south side of the circle in the City of Rocks. Henry Belnap bought the William Johnston place and became one of the early school teachers. The Cutlers also settled near Circle Creek just at the entrance to the City of Rocks. This property later bought by Willis Lloyd.

Gwins had settled where Almo Creek enters Raft River. They sold to Chris Hansen.

David O. Allen moved into Almo to serve as the Bishop in . He homesteaded land in section 18 near the Graham property that had been sold to the Bruesches in 1903. That ranch is still owned by William Bruesch.

By about 1900 the face of the place began to change. Many of the settlers were able to build new homes. A project was set up to make brick. The first kiln was set up the hill where Bert Tracy later built his home on section 26. Many men seemed to have building skills but they secured the services of a skilled brick-layer to do that work. The Thomas King home just north of the store was built, the two story William Jones home, John Lowe home were veritable mansions for that time. I know how substantially they were constructed for I later was called upon to correct some of the deficiencies not thought of at that time, such as clothes closets, cabinets, and later bathroom and kitchen sinks. Every partition was solid brick set on a rock foundation. It took considerable hard work to drill through for pipes etc.

I must not leave out the coming of another family to the community since it is most important to my own existence here. The Bruesches were on their way to Oregon from New Mexico. Grandpa had a family of twelve children, some were boys he hoped to establish on ranches in the north west. They came into the valley at the "Narrows" or the E.Y. Ranch. Bishop King and William Eames found them camped there to rest, wash clothes, etc. It was now quite late in the fall so they were advised by these men to spend the winter here rather than chance the dangers of an early winter, and subsequent hardships getting farther north. The Grahams cabin was vacant so it was arranged for them to use that home. The mountains reminded Grandpa Bruesch of his native home in Switzerland, and by spring the family had happily decided to stay. I'm sure it was a welcome decision for grandmother too after the long tedious trek from Las Crusus, New Mexico. They became one of the stalwart families of the community.

Beginning about 1913 the valleys in the southern part of Cassia County began to fill up with people many hoping to be able to dry farm. A Ward was organized in Naf, one in Moulton in the Junction Valley and many new settlers had come to Almo. I remember Isaac A. Carr, Jesse Olson, John Thompson, a Heath, and a Spencer family homesteading out south

of Almo. Mr. Carr later set up and operated a post office. This little building still standing just back of the present store. Other new comers were John T. Horne, who later became our Bishop, Orlando Bateman, Joseph Spencer, Frank and John Richards, William and Richard Barrett, Orson Sanders, Job Adams, and Thomas Shoemaker. Gustave Erickson also brought his family in. He too was a very gifted mason and arrived just in time for the next big building project. The Ericksons homesteaded up in the Little Cove where Big Jim Durfee had established.

Many of the descendants of the original families had established homes here also. Among these were: Ernest, Jesse, Reuben, Owen, Oscar and Ida (Romans) Jones, H. D. Jr, Lorenzo, Annie (Cahoon), Sarah (Taylor), Alice (Rice), Ida (Bruesch), Durfee, Henry Edgar King, Thomas, Joseph and Gordon Edwards, John C, Wesley, Asael, Orville Ward, Charles, Joel Wake, Herman, James T, Harry Taylor, Charles, Eva (Sheridan) Johnston, Eugene, Henry Durfee, Jim and Rebecca (Surplus) Durfee, Robert, Louis Eames.

Most of these settlers had families and were anxious to have their children in school. The first school was held in 1882 at the home of George Graham in S 20 T. 15S R. 24E BM. Another school was held in the Joseph Nicholas home in S 13 T. 15S R. 24# BM with Mrs. David Ward as teacher. School was also held in the Hubbard home in S12 T. 16S R. 24E BM. School was held in a building on the NE corner of S 15 T. 15S R. 24E BM. These schools were finally all consolidated as Dist. 14 held in a building on the NE corner of S 27 T. 15S R. 24E BM. This building consisted of a brick structure erected about 1902 with the log building from the Hubbard ranch as an addition. In 1916 a new 4 room brick building was erected on this site.

In the fall of 1940, we got electricity in the valley. I had the privilege of wiring, plumbing and installing central heat units in many homes. Not only the homes but also the church and school could be modernized and our people soon installed a furnace in the school. It was a steam heat system, radiators replacing the old wood stoves each room had used. Sometimes inexperience and inadequate knowledge can turn great new things into tragic and expensive lessons. Such came to be our experience. A large coal storage place had been dug under the school, also a basement for the furnace. Early in March a load of slag or furnace coal had been brought. It was very wet when placed in the hole under the school, a perfect set up for an explosion. Sunday AM March 6th it erupted and our school was in flames. There was nothing to be done but watch it burn. The county rallied to help by gathering books, old desks and materials with which to finish the school year. The church was offered for a temporary place to do so, and thus ended the year of 1945. Again my wife was involved, having offered to teach during the shortage of teachers brought on by the 2nd World War.

Our school board was faced with the problem of getting a new building. After much consideration it was proposed that the community build by assessment direct, instead of bonding the district and going in debt. Members of the community agreed with a promise that the local people be given a chance to work out some of their assessment on the building. they hired a contractor on that basis and went to work. A Mr. Forester took the overseer job. Everyone who had a skill and time went to work. Fortunately the fire had left the walls intact and inspection proved they were safe to leave. Earl Taylor and I took on the task of rescuing and rebuilding the heating system. The pipes were usable, also the radiators. Unable to find rubber gaskets to seal the spaces in the radiator sections, I discovered that the rubber rings

from my wife's fruit jars would work beautifully. (These were glass lids in use at that time, requiring a rubber ring also to seal) Earl Taylor and I (Elbert Durfee) succeeded in restoring the heating system. By time for school to open in the fall of 1945 our building was ready. We were proud of it and I might say justly so. We had pulled together and done a great job. Our youngsters had their school. Bad times were yet in store, however. Many of the younger generation had found employment or homes elsewhere. The older people stayed with their ranches and gradually the number of children in school became smaller and smaller. The district had been forced to consolidate and the 7th and 8th and send them to school in Malta.

The settlers were mostly "Mormons", members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. So a church was soon a must. The first church building was a log structure located in section 14, at the end of the hill near Gary and Juanita Jones present home. Myron B. Durfee was called as Branch President, a branch of the Oakley Ward, Cassia Stake. Thomas Owen King was the first Bishop when Almo became a ward, Nov. 25, 1887. The members of the Ward were as a rule, pretty hard working, and a tough set of pioneer stock. Most of them did not keep the Word of Wisdom. President Jack called David Allen to be their Bishop with instructions to correct the problem. Of course feelings were hurt and tempers ruffled. One day a group of the younger oldsters got together and were going to ride their Bishop out "one a rail" so to speak. My Uncle Jake Bruesch, a new comer to the valley and a non

About 1915 the Church of Jesus Christ of Latterday Saints began to divide up and change some of the Stake boundaries. The Cassia Stake had extended from Toole, Utah on up into the Carey country. Almo had been a branch of the Oakley Ward, but as it grew to become a ward, 25 Nov., 1887, so did other little settlements, Elba, Yost, Naff, Moulton, Lynn (in the Junction Valley) etc. So came about the creation of the Raft River Stake. Its head quarters to be Almo. Grouse creek, from over in Utah was also brought into our Stake. The Stake was organized April 27, 1915. John T. Elison was brought in from Oakley to be Stake President. Joseph Harper, from Albion, was his counselor, brought in from Albion. Fred Nye family also came in from Albion. He bought the Bruesch place. (Granpa's family grown and mostly gone. Jake bought the Allen property by Lone Rock, later took the home place back.) It must have been a great sacrifice that the Elisons, Harpers and others were uprooted from their homes to officer the church in a new community and start over. But such was done in these early times. Elisons built a frame house in town near the church, Harpers bought a place from Brachenbury. President Elison was himself a good builder and no doubt made his meager living by that means. He built a house for the Brackenburys, and a mill in addition to the new construction for the stake house. The flour mill was built up on the hill north of the rock house belonging to Harold Durfee(1989).

The expected raising of dry land wheat never materialized. There was not enough summer moisture come for this valley and that in the Junction valley often froze they were to discover. However the building project proceeded. A basement was dug on the north end of the brick church. It was done with picks and shovels, teams and scrapers, and of course the men who eagerly took tot he project. As a boy of twelve or about, I remember being a part of it too. I was allowed to bring some of the materials over the hill from Oakley (a railroad there at the time) with our trusty team, old Prince and Snip, hitched to our wagon. I remember being somewhat fearful at first and though I got behind quite a ways my good old team just

tugged right along and over the top. The basement was divided into classrooms and above it they built a large amusement hall. It had a hard wood maple floor and a stage in the west end. This was to bring a new dimension to the community.

The Stake Headquarters at Almo was short lived. People were unable to make a living with the resources available. The grain growing projects could not make it, and most of the farms too small to support the numbers who had moved here. The Stake was moved to Malta after less than five years and with it some of the progressive, faithful members. The mill also moved. This was a blow to the Almo people and it would be many years before the "wound" would heal. The building remained, however, and was put to good use for years to come.

The people had always provided good times for themselves. Dances had been held up above the Tracy Mercantile. A number of the resident played the "fiddle"; Henry (Pate) Cahoon was a great fiddler. Ted (Edgar) King could play any of the tunes on the piano and all by ear. So square dances, quadrilles, polkas, Virginia Reel, two steps and waltzes were enjoyed. Of course with a new hard-wood floor dancing became even more popular. People came from all the surrounding communities to enjoy the fun. Young and old were included. The babies would be put to sleep on benches while the oldsters danced far into the night.

Dancing was not the only amusement the new hall furnished. At the west end there was a stage constructed and several dramas were produced each year. They were cast from the local people and served to develop their talents and entertainment as well.

Dancing was not the only activity enjoyed in the new hall. It became a Drama center also. Mrs. Val Brackenbury produced some great plays with Ward talent. I remember what a great villain my Uncle Den Durfee made. Steve Cahoon (Tiff) was a "natural" for a darky. To provide entertainment these pioneers organized a Dramatic Company directed by Charles Heath. Harry T. Eames started a Brass Band. The instruments were purchased at Oakley by Harry Eames, William Eames and Henry Cahoon on credit and paid for by giving entertainments in the various communities round about. A choir was also started with Harry Eames and Robert Wake as directors. Their instrument, a tuning fork only, and the wonderful voices of many of the settlers.

Harry Eames has been responsible for establishing the Brass Band. It was a good one. The Eames family led out in many of the cultural activities of the town. Great Fourth of July celebrations were organized with programs in the hall, parades, races and ball games for the young people. The first 4th of July celebration was held in 1884, in the Cove school house. The first flag was made by the ladies of Almo and raised by Abe Hogland, B.B. Brackenbury, and William Eames. The same day Thomas Edwards and Clara Hall raised the flag on top of Mt. Independence. Relief Society 17th of March socials were also great events. They always ended with a big dance. This was an all day celebration. The women prepared their best cakes, pies, meats and other goodies to make a grand feast. The adults had dinner at noon, then a program. The school was dismissed about 2:00 or 2:30 and the children came for their feast. Then they had a children's dance. The faithful town band furnishing the music as enthusiastically for the kids as for the oldsters. Parents joined in, helping the children have fun. Those were never to be forgotten good times. The grown ups returned again in the evening to dance far into the night.

I must not fail to mention some other accomplishments of our community and some of the people who contributed to it. Bishop John Horne was a good musician. He taught the

people to sing well. The good singers were made better and at one time won first place with a men's quartet sponsored by the church in Salt Lake. William Eames always took great pride in, and encouraged the people in music and drama. Ernest Jenson, who grew up on the ranch now owned by Bruce and Kent Durfee, was a great coronet player and later with his wife, brought their orchestra from Ogden to furnish us with one of the best dance bands in the country.

Great and exciting times also resulted in the basketball games that were played. Each little community had its team and there was much rivalry displayed. Teams from Grouse Creek Ward, Elba, Yost, and as far south as Thatcher, Utah, known as Bothwell, participated in those games.

Basketball was also a great sport that could now be enjoyed here. Each community had its team and there was much rivalry displayed. Teams from Grouse Creek ward, Elba, Yost, and as far south as Thatcher (now Bothwell) participated.

The new church eventually became the old church. There were more changes to take place. It had, of course been heated with wood stoves. Two large ones served for the chapel. Those near the front could be more comfortable, for they were near the stoves. That helped a problem which developed in our new building, from being too troublesome--empty front seats. Light for the church was first produced by a gasoline engine and generator. This is where I developed my first experience with electricity. It took considerable maneuvering, and patience to keep the outfit doing the job. The power was stored in a series of glass batteries. Sometimes I had to spend the greater part of a day making ready for an evenings entertainment. When electricity came to our valley in 1940 we were able to install an oil furnace. Though it was not 100% perfect it was a great improvement. A little later when I was Bishop we did some remodeling and installed rest rooms in the basement. We also added a little carpeting and drapes for the windows.

CHANGES---PROGRESS AND EFFECTS 1920-1990

When the hopes and prospects for dry farming in and near the Almo Valley failed changes were bound to come about. As mentioned earlier the Church of Jesus Christ of Latterday Saints had made this a Stake headquarters but many of the settlers, unable to make adequate living were forced to leave. Consequently the Stake was moved to Malta. Most of the older and larger ranches were able to maintain the families but gradually increased grazing permits and swallowed up some of the smaller places. The young people had to leave to find employment or other places to make a living. After the first World War and the aftermath the little community settled into a period of fairly good times. The school still maintained three teachers though enrolment was beginning to dwindle. The Mercantile, now operated by Joseph Tracy and William Eames provided the needs of the families now living here. "Joe" maintained a trucking business hauling cattle out to market and produce in fro Pocatello and Ogden. Then a new disaster struck. The 1929 crash and following fast also the drought of "the Thirties", both of which took its toll on the community, and the county. People unable to pay taxes lost their homes and had to leave. The school district was forced to hold a seven month school term in 1931-1932 school year, and the following term they held an eight month school term by reducing the teachers wages. My future wife was one of the teachers, for those two years. Her first salary had been \$90 a month, the principle's wage \$110.

The year 1931-1932 those wages were cut to \$90 for the principle and \$70 for the other two teachers, but they held an eight month school term.

Most of the people still living here were not too much affected by the depression at first, for they had been pretty much self-sustaining. They produced much of their own food and fashioned their clothing themselves. A yearly trip to Ogden for fruit to preserve and needed material not produced here was all that they were used to. However when drought struck it was a hardship. The few stock normally sold to provide these things could not be sold. The government bought some, \$12.00 for a good milk cow, and just destroyed the rest. Some tried to send cows to Ogden and took as little as \$2.00 per head after freight charges. So Almo people struggled through some very lean years. Gradually fair water years returned and the financial crunch eased up for many.

A little more concerning the Almo Store may be of interest to this narrative. William Tracy had come from Yost, across the valley, and in conjunction with his nephew, set up the mercantile establishments. Albert's grandmother lived in a house in the trees just south of the present store. William soon turned the business over to Albert and developed a place in the Circle. The Tracys were quite enterprising and Albert purchased a large number (for those days) of Holstein cows from Wisconsin, brought them in and sold them to the families. This brought about a little dairy operation.. Butter and some cheese sold locally and to the miners coming in and later cream taken out to their places. This was the only "cash crop" available. The families sustained themselves on small farms of forty to one hundred acres of land, raising a little grain and hay for livestock and enough to take to the mill in Oakley for flour, which they called a grist. A few men, Jones and Wards secured forest grazing rights and prospered more quickly with herds of cattle and sheep. William Eames became a partner of Albert Tracy and the store or Merc passed to his nephew Joseph Tracy and wife Otella Eames, daughter of William. The store is still operated by their children. (1989)

I might insert a little note of interest to some. Albert Tracy donated a pendulum clock to the church (probably the first structure). It hung in the church many years. It finally stopped but no one wanted to discard it. One day I (Elbert Durfee) took it down and began to examine the workings. I discovered the pendulum bearings had worn out and dropped the pendulum below the ratchet. I filled the holes with solder, drilled new holes and got the clock running. That was back in the 1930s. It has existed to have a prominent place in the new church constructed in the 1980s.

One of the first changes to help us here was the oiled road. The government had established The Works Progress Administration in 1933 and 34 to alleviate the unemployment and our county had built a new and better road over the Albion mountains. I had worked on this myself with one of my father's teams. We received \$2.00 a day for the team and \$2.00 for myself, which was a welcome amount for my dad's family and my own. (I had married the summer before). Now in the 1940's we were able to get our road oiled beginning at the Almo Store into Malta and over the Albion ridge and into Burley. This was a great improvement on our transportation. We had better access to our county offices in Burley, doctor services, etc.

Another big step forward for us was the coming of the electrical power. Some of our enterprising citizens had worked to establish a Rural Electrification System. The fall of 1940 saw our little valley lighted by electricity. My what a change this was to make in our lives.