

History of Almo and Surrounding Areas

In 1877 arid western lands without irrigation could be claimed under the Desert Land Act. In 1891 the Act was amended requiring that detailed plans for irrigation systems be submitted and that \$1 per acre be spent in each of the first three years of development. This labor and money could be shared by communal ditch associations but could not be undertaken on behalf of others.

Cattle dealer James Q Shirley was the first white man to use the Almo area as a home base. In 1869, Shirley and his hired man trailed 13,000 head of Texas longhorns to the area. Here they made camp, raising a garden and utilizing the cove below Graham Peak as a natural corral.

In the 1880's, the Raft River Valley with its abundant plantings of alfalfa hay became known as the best place in the west to winter sheep. There were free open range privileges and the general area was safe for the bands.

The drought of 1886-1891 and the endless winters of 1882, 1886, and 1889 brought years of overgrazing and brought winter range use to a screeching halt. The old time cowmen reported losses of 50 to 90 per cent during the winter of 1882. The Winecup which branded 38,000 calves in 1885, branded 68 in 1891. The sheep industry was equally devastated.

Forty years after the wagon trains rolled west through the area, Mormon families began to settle in the Raft River Valley. Among the first to arrive were Thomas Edwards, Henry R. Cahoon, Myron B. Durfee, William Jones, and Thomas Owen King, a pony express rider. Followed by Charles Ward, John O. Lowe, and Robert Wake. These settlers claimed the lands along the Almo, Grape, and Edwards creeks. The Cahoon and Durfee families settled along Almo Creek with the intentions of farming. In 1882 Henry Cahoon boasted that they raised 5600 bushels of wheat, oats, and barley and 1500 bushels of potatoes of the best quality. Irrigation systems were developed from springs and creeks.

By 1909 the agricultural zone watered by Circle, Almo, Grape, Edwards, Cassia, and Marsh Basin consisted of almost 12,000 acres of irrigated farmlands surrounding the communities of Almo, Elba, Basin, and Albion. Even then potatoes were an important cash crop and were freighted to the mining communities of Hailey and Boise Basin.

In Almo, Elba, and Albion, in 1880, the numerous children were "at school" the women" at home, and the men most often identified themselves as stockmen, farmers and merchants. Most of the settlers were of English or Scandinavian descent. By the turn of the century, Almo boasted a school, post office, and a store. A drama company, and a brass band both traveled to surrounding towns. The three saloons and other undesirable elements had been controlled through the creation of the Village Control Organization.

In 1920, the town of Almo supported 260 “souls” the majority of whom were farmers or stock raisers. The town contained the finest meeting house in the Raft River Stake (a brick replacement for the log meeting house constructed in 1880), a modern schoolhouse, Tracy and Eames General Mercantile, a hotel, a barber shop, a small road-side inn, and a number of fine brick residences.

The people had always provided a good time for themselves... Square dances, quadrilles, polkas, Virginia Reel, two steps, and waltzes were enjoyed. People came from the surrounding communities of Elba, Yost, Oakley etc. to enjoy the fun. Young and old were included. The babies would be put to sleep on the benches while the oldsters danced into the night...Relief Society 17th of March socials were great events. This was an all day celebration. The school was dismissed about 2:00 and the children came for the feast. Then they had a children’s dance. Those were never to be forgotten good times. “Remembrances of Almo Community” Elbert Durfee.

Baseball teams that traveled to neighboring communities played an important role in the recreation enjoyed by the area residents as did Durfee Hot Springs, a natural spring of warm water that was developed into a swimming resort by Henry Miller and Rosa Durfee in the early 1900’s. Durfee Hot Springs is currently under construction by their descendants, Jackie Durfee Henson, and her husband Larry, and will once again be a public swimming resort in Almo.

Weaving carpets to cover floors, making candles, mending shoes, tanning leather, making soap, ironing with irons heated on wood stoves, butchering their own meat, raising gardens, and orchards, cooking, cleaning, nursing, midwifing, and parenting were common tasks performed by the women in helping sustain a livelihood with their husbands.

To supplement their meager incomes, the men would look for other ways which included freighting, hiring out for construction such as at the Oakley Dam, shearing sheep, sugar-beet factory jobs, threshing grain, putting up hay, trapping, selling or trading deer hides.

Religion and school played an important role in the lives of the families in the communities of the area. One quote from the life story of Bertha Taylor Kimber regarding her education. “I graduated from the 8th grade in the new Almo school...I took the eighth grade twice because I didn’t want to stay home. The folks did not want to let me go away from home and there was no high school in Almo. (in 1918) I coaxed Dad to let me go to high school at Oakley. He wasn’t thrilled about it but he did let me go. Grace Thompson and I rented a room and batched together. We paid \$4 a month rent.”

GRAPE CREEK

Grape Creek, located between Almo and Elba, was so named because of the wild grapes and currants that grew along the creek banks.

The first post office was known as Ward, Idaho. Mr. John Lowe ran it.

The first four families were the John Lowe, Charles Ward, Robert Wake and Alfred Ward. Mr Lowe, his wife and two sons came in 1875.

MR. AND MRS. ASAEL LOWE

Asael Lowe son of John Lowe, was born at the ranch on Grape Creek where he and his wife Cecil Ellen Durfee raised their family. He attended the Grape Creek-Cove School and furthered his education at the Albion State Normal School. They traveled by team and buggy from Almo to Kelton, Utah, the nearest railway station, where they boarded the train and went to Ogden to be married on May 28, 1912. They went on to Salt Lake for a week's honeymoon, then returned to Almo to make their home. They purchased the home place on Grape Creek. More than a hundred + years later, Jay Black, a great grandson of John Lowe, is the present owner and still actively engaged in the livestock business

Now a little about the small community of Yost, where I currently live with my husband, Stan. We ranch with his brothers, Mike and Carl and our children, Brian, Erik, and our son-in-law DJ Stanger. I was raised in Almo and am a descendant of the Durfee's and Stan was raised in Yost the son of Wallace and Dorothy Spencer. My mother was raised in Yost and a descendant of the early settlers, the Tracy's and Smith's.

YOST, UTAH

Yost was known as "George Creek" in the early days because it was named after the largest stream that furnished irrigation water for the community.

Later when a post office was being established in the town an official name had to be given and so it was given the name of Yost after the first white settler in the valley, Charles Yost.

It was officially named Yost in 1895 and Charles Yost was the first postmaster.

In 1872 Charles Yost came to Utah and hired out to Governor William Emery on the E.Y. Ranch on the Raft River in Idaho owned by Mr. Emery then, now owned by Roscoe Ward, Almo.

While working for Mr. Emery Mr. Yost found the big spring across the Idaho line in Utah and filed on the land under the Utah Homestead Act in 1873. He began at once to clear the land near the large cold spring in preparation for building a cabin. This is presently part of our ranch, Spencer Land & Livestock.

He married in 1879 and built a house over the spring which served as a refrigerator, cooled by the spring water. It was known far and wide as the spring house. The water then ran down the hill and watered a garden.

In early days Yost was like other areas, tall grass, plenty of free grazing, lots of water, and people coming to make their homes. With people came children who needed a school. A log raising was held and a one-room schoolhouse was built, a little west of where the present church now stands.

The mail was first brought through the country from Kelton over the California trail, there being a station for changing horses in the City of Rocks. In 1886 a Sunday school was held in William Tracy's home on the east side of George Creek. In 1903 the

branch became a ward with Thomas Blackburn as bishop and they belonged to the Cassia Stake at Oakley with H.D. Haight, Sr., stake president.

A Century of Change

The hamlet of Yost, Utah, four miles from the Utah-Idaho border, is tucked away in the mountains in the extreme northwest corner of Box Elder County, Utah. Yost is surrounded on three sides by mountains; and it is fully accessible only by entering through Idaho on the north into the valley, where most of its population resides. Yost has seen many changes, and one of these changes is in the actual name of the community and surrounding areas. Usually, different areas were named in honor of those who first discovered them or by words which described the place. Perhaps the first names connected with Yost were George Town and George Creek, so named after George Davis, who was an early "squatter" in one of the canyons. Also, Little Valley, Wildcat, and Camprock are a few of the early descriptive names which are still well known. As other people passed through the area, Oliver Springs, Charleston Canyon, Reid Springs, Johnson Creek, and Brown's Timber received their names. Later, Yost received its permanent name after Charles Yost.

As the community took shape, Rudolph Walters acted as the doctor and also served as Justice of the Peace. Frank Tracy operated the first sawmill, and from this mill lumber was supplied to replace the dirt homes and to build new homes. In the growth of any community comes the necessity for a store; and this was supplied by William Tracy, who operated the first general store. His store did a thriving business as he sold calico for \$.05 a yard and eggs for .05 to .07 a dozen. The people were happy and working hard to realize their dreams and to prosper.

Even though Yost continued to prosper, it, like any other frontier town, was not without problems—one of which occurred in the summer of 1887 when jack rabbits invaded and literally mowed down the crops. The success of crops being paramount in the shaping of a farming and ranching village, it became a battle between the native rabbits and the new human encroachers; but, by the desire of the people to hold onto their new farms and ranches, the rabbits were killed in moonlight rabbit drives.

Perhaps religion held the people closer together than anything else, and it was the bond which helped in the realization of their dreams. As with most early Utah and surrounding western state settlements, the early people were predominantly members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Most of the people were poor and provided for their needs by growing, making it, or trading for it.

In 1887, a log house with a rough floor and slab benches was built which served as the church.

As the community grew and became more stable the community was large enough for a school. There were children to be educated, and there needed to be a place to receive that education. In 1890, a log building was put up with poles across the top, covered with straw and dirt, for the roof. The people made plans for a rock church house to replace the log one. In 1898, under the direction of Presiding Elder Beus, the first rock for the "old" church house was laid. They hauled the rock from a hill on Edward Yates' place, and little by little the building began to take shape. In 1900, the church house was completed and still stands in the valley. It is presently owned by John McCray who has makes it his home.

Yost grew and during the half century saw a hotel erected as well as a thriving milk business. By this time, the school, too, had grown and reached a peak of about 65 students. The students met in a new and modern school building and even had a hot lunch added.. A garage was added to the community and was owned and operated by Gerald and Loyal Gill on the Blyth place. It still serves as a garage today – mine!

One of the things which made the growth of Yost possible was the fact that electricity was turned on in the valley in 1941. Some 13 years after electricity came to Yost, the first television sets appeared and, shortly thereafter, motion pictures, which were shown by Melvin A. Brown. Also, by this time, the mail was improved to daily service and was carried from Malta. The mail, television, and the motion picture all made it a little easier for Yost to be a part of the modern world and to know immediately of the world situation.

Today the population of Yost consists of 14 families or about 36 residents. Those who are not retired are involved in the livestock business. The school is now the county road shed. Both churches have been turned into homes. The store and post office are long gone and mail is rural delivery.

Awareness that the local communities in this area are a special place is expressed by residents and visitors alike. The City of Rocks was once at the crossroads of transcontinental travel. It is now on one of the back roads of America, accessed only by those who seek it.

The rural setting however, is beginning to once again see change. It is ironic that in 1852, 52,000 emigrants passed through the area in covered wagons and in 2005, 80,000 visitors, some in modern day “covered wagons” RV’s visit the area. The excerpts from diaries from those early travelers express the same appreciation and awe that visitors express today.

The establishment of City of Rocks National Reserve Headquarters in 1988 in Almo has prompted the development of new businesses to cater to the tourists. A restaurant, The Almo Creek Outpost, The Old Homestead Bed and Breakfast, Castle Shadows Bed & Breakfast, Castle View RV Park, Rock City Repair, Durfee Hot Springs, and in 2003, the establishment of Castle Rocks State Park are having an impact. I am an employee at City of Rocks and have seen a lot of changes in the twelve years I have worked here. The tourists are in awe of the serenity of the rural setting and the beauty of the parks. I made a camping reservation a couple of weeks ago for a family coming in from Canada. They had been here a number of years ago and were thrilled at the sight of a cattle drive through the City of Rocks where they were camping. She surely hoped to see one again on this visit. The two diverse activities, ranching and recreation are learning to co-exist and appreciate the unique situations it brings. I am sure many local ranchers are in photo collections throughout the world, as they move their cattle to summer pasture. City of Rocks employees about 30 people in the summer – most of us are from the surrounding area which has helped the economy in our rural area. I will close this talk with an invitation to come visit Almo and Castle Rocks State Park on July 16. We are holding a festival at Castle Rocks State Park that celebrates the ranching and rural heritage of the

area at an annual event – RanchFest. I have some event schedules to hand out. If you look in it for the City of Rocks stamp – bring it to me and you will receive a free copy of the Historical Resource Study by the NPS that I took material from for this talk. They are limited and if you enjoy history about the area this is an excellent resource. Thank you for listening and Lee Ann inviting me to speak. I think she owes me!