

Three years before anyone settled here, J.S. Shirley, a cattleman and first owner of the Kegho Ranch in Raft River valley, fenced the Cove and used it as a pasture for his saddle ponies and range cattle.

His hired man raised a garden in Little Cove, but lived in a log cabin on what was later the H.D. Durfee place in the Big Cove. He cut timber to fence the Cove and also the Kegho ranch. The next home was built by Mr. Homes on the William Jones ranch, now operated by Owen Jones.¹

Idaho's Raft River Valley was a crossroad of the West over a century ago in the days of the Overland Trails.

Charles S. Gamble, a native of Maryland, claimed to be the oldest settler in Cassia County, which originally formed a part of Owyhee County.

He arrived in the Raft River Valley in December, 1868, with a herd of cattle belonging to John Quincy Shirley. Gamble was 22 years of age when he arrived in the valley. Mr. Gamble and his cowboys associates of the Shirley Company held full control over this section of the country for years. After 1870, other cattlemen came into the district. They enclosed large acreages for grazing purposes and half dozen ranch houses were erected in the valley.

This was the first band of Texas cattle ever brought into that part of the country. A ranch house was built on the west bank of Raft River at what is now known as the Pierce Ranch. There were about ten men in the company, including Mr. Shirley, who owned the cattle, together with a man by the name of Sweetzer, who resided in California. At this time there were no other inhabitants in that part of Idaho, except those employed at the overland route stations, on which coaches were running from Brigham City, Utah to Boise. There was one station at Clear Creek, another at Raft River, what is now known as the Narrows and the third at the City of Rocks.

This, however, was not on the so-called Sublett cutoff, which entered the Raft River Valley from the east through what is now called Sublett Canyon.

This cut-off crossed Raft river at Pierce's Ranch and passed up Cassia Creek where Elba is now located, thence to Almo Junction Valley to Goose Creek which is 22 miles south of Oakley.

The Shirley outfit held full control of Raft River Valley until about 1870 when other stockmen came in. No attempt was made by these ranchers at farming; they were just engaged in raising cattle. When the Latter-day Saints came into the Raft River Valley there were about a half dozen ranches in the valley.

When Frank Riblett came to the Raft River Valley, as a young man in 1876 he found the so-called Shirley Sweetzer Ranch above the present site of Malta. He described it as a very extensive ranch extending about eight miles from north to south and covering nearly the whole width of the valley.

There was at that time another ranch owned by a Mr. Coe below the present site of Malta and still another ranch on Clear Creek, called the Scharbacker and Lewis Ranch. The owners of these ranches were all exclusively engaged in raising cattle and made no pretense at farming.

By 1883, 2,500 people were being well sustained by agriculture, cattle, lumber and freighting business.

¹"Chronicle of Almo Tells of First Stockmen and Farmers" com. Etta Taylor, Herald-Bulletin correspondent for Almo. date?

The town of Malta was not founded until about 1890 and its growth and maturity were achieved in a decade. The earliest residents were Frank Hall, Thomas N. Smith and the Neddo family.

Sublett received its first impulse towards progress from the hands of Thomas Hutchison, John Gilliher and Mr. Kempton in 1876.

Frank Riblett, distinguished as teacher, surveyor and Marshal held title to the water rights. All these water rights were purchased from him by Emanuel Sanford in 1880 for \$600. However, a group of Mormons had executed the usual group action in 1878 when Thomas J., Heber C. and Enoch R. Dayley, Moroni Fairchild, Hyrum Egan and Soloman Park got together for their mutual benefit. Their position for a season was in jeopardy because of the Indians, but in due time they became secure.

In 1870 there was more water in Cassia Creek and Raft River. They both overflowed their banks, at times being 18 inches deep and a mile wide.

There were meadows on both sides of the rivers as a result. There were no fences or bridges on either side of the creek or river.

Cattle ranching was started by Sweetzers from California and Tenan and Taylor from Texas.

Jim Pierce came from Texas in 1871 bringing cattle Sweetzer and Shelley bought, and Pierce stayed on becoming a partner to Sweetzer. Fred Kossman worked for Sweetzer-Pierce for nine years at \$35 a month. He started as a boy and they often worked 20 hours a day. They took the cattle to Montana from May to July averaging seven or eight miles a day on the trail. There would be eight men besides the wranglers and cook for the drive. They took the cattle to Rosebud, Montana. Later they loaded them out of American Falls.²

Hon. James M. Pierce, late senator of Cassia county, and one of the leading as well as one of the earliest of the county's stockmen, was born at Weinsley, in western Tennessee, on November 26, 1851. His parents were John and Nancy (Allen) Pierce, descendants of old Southern families of English ancestry. The father was a native of Tennessee and the mother of South Carolina. They moved to Missouri in 1860 with their two sons and two daughters, where both passed the remainder of their lives, the father dying in November, 1868, and the mother in June, 1897. Their son James attended the district schools of his native state for a few months and completed his education in those of Missouri after the removal of the family to that state. He remained at home until he was nineteen, then came to Idaho, where he found employment with Messrs. Shirley and Brooks, leading cattlemen, with whom he remained three years. At the end of that time he became superintendent of the Sweetser Cattle Company, which he served in that capacity until the spring of 1879. In 1880 he formed a partnership with Mr. Sweetser, which lasted twenty years, in the course of which they did an enormous business. In 1890 they had about 15,000 range cattle and other interests in proportion. Up to this time Mr. Pierce owned a one-third interest in the business and was its sole manager. In 1901 he sold his holding to Mr. Sweetser's son, and since then has been engaged in the business wholly on his own account. He is an active Democrat in politics, always giving the affairs of his party a hearty and enthusiastic as well as

²Taken from "Raft River Valley was a Crossroad" by Fontella Tracy, South Idaho Press, 100 years of progress edition, August, 1970.

helpful support, but has never desired public office himself. In 1897, however, he yielded to the importunities of party and other friends and accepted the nomination for state senator and was elected by a handsome majority, this being the only office he has ever held. In the sessions of the senate during his term he rendered efficient service to his constituents and was potential in aiding much good and preventing much bad legislation in which the general interests of the state were vitally involved. He is a zealous Freemason in fraternal connection, and has been an ornament to the order ever since he joined it, sixteen years ago. Throughout his life Mr. Pierce has been an active and indefatigable worker for any cause he had in hand, his cattle business taking him all over the state and keeping him busily occupied. Yet he has always found time to consider and aid any judicious undertaking for the welfare of his home community, and he had a influential voice in shaping and directing public opinion into healthy expression and action. He was married on November 3, 1879, to Miss Eliza Ganniher (Galliher, family correction), daughter of John and Sarah (Browning) Ganniher, of Ogden, Utah. They have six children, Louella, William, Arthur, Jessie M., Sadie and Nellie, all attending school at Albion. As a pioneer in the cattle industry who came to this county in the infancy of the business, Mr. Pierce has witnessed its extraordinary growth and development, and has been a potent factor in pushing it forward. When he came to the county there were almost no cattlemen within its limits and its possibilities in this line were yet to be determined. It is greatly to his credit that, in spite of adverse circumstances and unpromising conditions, he persevered in his efforts to establish the industry here, and the results have amply demonstrated his wisdom and the justification for the firmness of his faith.³

The first sizeable herd of 3,000 cattle ever brought into what is now Cassia County was done so in 1869 by an 18-year-old boy.

It is reported that J.A. Pierce, then in his teens, was the main drover of long-horn steers, making the trial trek from Texas ending in the Raft river country of Cassia County. The Pierce ranch, located near Malta, was still operated in 1974 by Art Pierce, grandson of the original pioneer cattleman.

Early cattle operations in the area were greater in the 1800s than today. One year after what is claimed was the establishment of the industry, records show the same outfit alone in 1870 brought approximately 10,000 head into the county. Before 1886, it is estimated that 230,000 beef were brought into the area. A cycle of extra severe winters around 1886-87 and 1889-90 so drastically depleted the livestock that the cattle interests were almost wiped out. The industry declined in this area from that point. To add to the difficulty, besides some of the worst winters in area history, the country was plagued in summers by a series of dry spells.

Before this natural catastrophe, there were several large cattle operations in the county. One of them, the Sparks-Tennin, by a consolidation with the Winecup-HP-Horse Shoe interest in 1882, had 175,000 head on range land from Goose Creek or Junction Valley on the east, to Bruneau or Devil Creek on the west, Snake River on the north, to American

³"Hon. James M. Pierce." Progressive Men of Southern Idaho. A.W. Bowen and Co. Chicago. 1904.

Desert on the south.

To show how natural calamity affected the industry, this outfit in 1885 branded over 38,000 calves. Following the extra severe winter of 1891 this same operation branded only 60. Unquestionably it was one of the worst periods for the cattle industry in southern Idaho's history, a blow that put many operators out of business, a setback that the large cattle operation in this area was never able to fully recover from and return to its former importance.⁴

Andrew Sweetser and J.Q. Shirley are the men credited with first ranching in Cassia County. That story is retold in every Idaho history book, with Sweetser's name spelled a half-dozen different ways. But in my studies I was interested in those who came after these cattle barons, the cattlemen who fought the sheepmen and farmers, who in turn became sheepmen and farmers themselves. One of these men was Andrew's son Lewis Sweetser.

Lew Sweetser seems best remembered at the "former Lieutenant-Governor," an impressive, if somewhat decorative, title. In addition he was a rancher, farmer, gold miner and potential Idaho Governor. Concurrent with many of these occupations Sweetser was also a writer and local historian, producing for the Burley Bulletin and other papers back in the 'teens and '20s columns devoted to Cassia County history.

Sweetser's writings now gather dust in the files of the South Idaho Press. Exhuming them now—even a small sampling—is a worthwhile project because they paint a fairly detailed picture of a time in local history that is forgotten, or at best remembered incorrectly. Sweetser lived through the period when Idaho changed from a frontier to a state, and was related to those who had pioneered Cassia County. His credential as a historian were better than most.

Of course Sweetser was not above glorifying Idaho's early settlers. In one column he wrote: "There are the frontier's men and women who drove an opening wedge that released this part of Snake River Valley to progress. they opened an empire to a later generation of easy-going moderns accustomed to refined existence that makes it hard for them to realize the energy, and determination, and courage and strength of character displayed by these old-timers in their winning of this fertile wasteland of the West."

That may seem awfully flowery to a modern reader but Sweetser was the child of a pioneer, writing for an audience composed of yet more children of pioneers. Theirs was a generation that had caught the tail-end of the frontier and felt that they had participated in the unique opportunity of settling an untamed land. There was yearning for that more rugged time of frontier settling—although one suspects that at the time the pioneers wanted very much a taste of the "refined existence."

Sweetser's life in Idaho gave him decades of subject matter for his writings. Born in San Francisco in 1868, Lew came to Cassia County when he was three, shortly after his father Andrew and J.Q. Shirley had set up their cattle ranch south of what would one day be Malta. Through the 1870's Sweetser and Shirley prospered, and with the replacement of Shirley

⁴"First Cattle and the winter of 1890" Western saga guide book by Alson William Dawson. Cassia Co. Hist. Soc. and Idaho Bicentennial Commission 1974.

by James Pierce and Andrew's brother John, "Sweetser Brothers and Pierce" became the dominant power in Raft River Valley.

In 1885 Lew headed east for Yale University when he met his future partners and lifelong friends George and Harry Burroughs of Chicago. Graduating from the Sheffield Scientific School in 1889 the three decided to make a go of it in the Idaho cattle business, an odd career move for three engineering students.

In August of 1890 "Sweetser and Burroughs, Dealers in Livestock" appeared for the first time in the Cassia County record books, purchasing from "Sweetser Brothers and Pierce" 320 acres along the Raft for the grand total of one dollar. With this donation to start them off, Lew and the Burroughs brothers embarked on their adventurous effort. The three staked out their territory and two miles south of the Raft's mouth they established the Bar Y Ranch, named in honor of their alma mater. A post office christened Yale soon followed.

There were few financial rewards in the cattle business but the next several years provided plenty of grist for Sweetser's writing mill. Looking through his columns one can see that Sweetser was most fascinated by the bad men of the west, migrant workers who passed through Cassia a few steps in front of the law. Sweetser employed and rode with many of these men, and his retelling of the conflict between such cowmen and the sheepmen highlights the more infamous periods of county history.

One of Sweetser's longest articles describes the last cattle drive-out of the Raft River Valley in 1894, and while it doesn't have the sweep of Lonesome Dove or other fictional stories it does show that Idaho could produce events that lived up to the mythic vision of the American wild West. In other stories he showed that Albion or American Falls could be just as rough and colorful as any town on the Texas cattle trails.

By 1897 the ranching business was looking to be a dead-end street, and so Sweetser and the Burroughses branched out into mining, putting their years of schooling to use. Seeing itinerant miners wandering up and down the Snake panning for gold, the three men figured there must be a better way. The Yale Dredging Company was formed to pull riches from the Snake River bottom.

A dredge was built, along with a houseboat to serve as base, and for several years the rechristened "Sweetser and Burroughs Mining Company" enjoyed prosperity. One local paper reported that "the gold saved by these dredges is of the flour variety and the success attained by the firm of Sweetser & Burroughs in saving it has caused a great deal of speculation among mining men as to the methods employed. Mr. Sweetser informed a reporter that the process was largely a secret of his firm's, the result of several years of expensive experiments."

The first flush of success led to expanded operations with a second dredge in the Stanley Basin. Gold fever did not strike twice, however, and very soon "Sweetser and Burroughs" was out of business. The dredge was abandoned to rust on the Snake River bottom and the houseboat provided the raw materials for the Verberg Wagon Bridge. In 1902 all the lands of "Sweetser and Burroughs" were sold to another livestock company for ten dollars. Things had not been a howling success.

Lew, George and Harry terminated their partnership but the friendship continued unto death. Sweetser tried sheep farming but this too fizzled. A brief and potentially impressive political career followed. Sweetser served two terms in the Idaho Legislature and was then elected Lieutenant-Governor in 1908 and 1910. His political apprenticeship over, Sweetser

sought the governorship on the Republican ticket in 1912. Unfortunately his wife Clara, whom he had married in 1902, apparently had a drinking problem. Politics being politics, Lew had to bow out of the race.

Sweetser returned to farming near Yale but didn't give up his public life, becoming an accomplished speaker and embarking on his writing career.

By the 1930's Sweetser's articles were carried in several papers in southern Idaho and northern Utah; his tales of the Duck Springs hermit were so popular that there was talk of syndicating them nationally.

In the winter of 1936 Lew and Clara vacationed in Los Angeles where, quite suddenly, Clara died. Following this tragedy Lew seems never to have come back to Burley. Among his personal papers is a sad little list he made of all his residences since arriving in California, showing his movements from one cheap apartment to another as his funds ran out.

On 8 June 1944, George Burroughs died near Los Angeles; the next day Lewis Sweetser passed away. The two were cremated together.

As Idaho's centennial approaches it seems only fitting to rediscover one of the state's earliest historians. The writing may be dated and the tales told perhaps a bit quaint, but Lewis Sweetser was someone who showed others what the West was like in the 1890's, of the people who "were toughened through long days' rides on rough-gaited broncs. Through breathing stifling dust behind the drag-end of trailed cattle or when scuffling with a buck-board along deep-rutted roads." Lewis Sweetser showed a past that is worth remembering.