

ALMO HOMES & BUSINESSES  
Excerpts from family histories

When I was eighteen we moved to Grandma Durfee's home and lived there about a year. (Uncle Gene went to Filer to work and Grandma Durfee was in Hagerman living with Daughters. Grandpa had died in 1895.) This house was in the field just east of the "Old Rock Store".

We liked to dance too and I would take Nanie to these dances. Sometimes the dance would be in the top of Uncle Will Eames' store and sometimes on the floor of the Tracy house that was being built. *Excerpt from Leo Durfee history*

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.<sup>1</sup>

The first post-office was in the home of Myron B. Durfee. Before this mail was addressed to Shirley Cove by way of Bridge, Idaho. <sup>2</sup> *Excerpt from Pierce Sweetser History*

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, 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.

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<sup>1</sup>"Chronicle of Almo Tells of First Stockmen and Farmers" com. Etta Taylor, Herald-Bulletin, Burley

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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

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.

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.

*. Excerpt from Elbert Durfee History*

### **Brief history of Bruesch Ranch's Main House and Upper House**

#### **Main House**

The Main House was constructed of logs in the summer of 1903 by John Jacob Bruesch Sr. (Johann Jacob Bruesch) and his family. The Douglas fir logs were harvested from the groves on the north side of Granite Mountain, southwest of the house. The logs were dragged off the mountain by draft horse. The logs were hewn by hand with an adz. The roof was an off-center design and was covered with tarpaper or rolled composition roofing. A man by the name Peterson helped JJ Sr. with the construction. Some time after initial construction, Gene Durfee covered the interior log walls with lath and plaster. The logs rest on a flat rock foundation. A concrete foundation fascia was later added to seal out the vermin and elements.

In 1936 the up-stairs was added. Bill (William Wallace) Bruesch along with Earl Taylor did most of the framing and carpentry. Gus Erickson's father built the chimney. Elbert Durfee installed the plumbing and fixtures in 1937 and the electrical wiring in about 1939. Electrical power service was provided by REA in November of 1940. Both porches were added in stages. The south porch began as a "lean-to" (roof supported on log house and posts) and eventually was enclosed in the 1940's. The east porch also began as a roof with supporting posts with final enclosure completed in late 1970's.

In the early 1950's the log exterior was covered with white asbestos shingle siding.

In 1992, the original cedar shingle roof was covered by painted steel sheet roofing.

The present lower level floor plan is the same (except for two doorway modifications) as constructed except for utilization of one bedroom for the bathroom and stairway.

## Upper House

The initial two room Upper House was constructed in 1941 of new lumber frame construction. The lean-to porch to the east was added in the late summer of 1942. In 1945 two bedrooms and a bathroom were added on the west side extending beyond to the south. Materials were salvaged from the Upper Ranch House (about one mile to the northwest) for the 1945 addition. Pressurized plumbing was included in the 1945 addition.

Bill Bruesch completed the majority of the Upper House's 1941 through 1945 construction. Most likely he received assistance from his father, John Jacob Bruesch Jr. (Jake) and brother Lawrence D. Bruesch (Bud) and others.

In the summer of 1974 the living room and an additional bedroom were added to the south resulting in the present configuration. The chimney was replaced in 1989 and a new painted sheet steel roof was added in the summer of 1993.

All phases of construction is supported on a concrete foundation. The porch has a concrete floor. *Courtesy of Alan Bruesch*

Eugene and Turah Bronson Durfee were married at Almo, Idaho, Nov. 27, 1901 at the old Durfee home.

The old slab, dirt roof house sat on the old Almo Creek, and in the spring the high water would splash into the house. In later years Dad cleaned the willows and made the bank higher. There was an old fashioned bay window in the kitchen and Mother had it full of beautiful flowers. She loved flowers, and later had a pretty yard.

On Nov. 1910, another sister, Vilate, was born. Uncle Hank Durfee and family had lived in the old house, but moved when we came back. Grandma Durfee divided her home place and gave Dad the 62 acres and the old house. Uncle Hank got the other 80 and he built them a home.

*Eugene Durfee History*

## DURFEE HOT SPRINGS

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. *Excerpt from Elbert Durfee*

## PONY EXPRESS

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.

## STORES

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 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.

## POST OFFICES

Mr. Carr later set up and operated a post office. This little building still standing just back of the present store.

## SCHOOLS

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 or 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.

### CHURCH

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.

About 1915 the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day 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, Nov. 25, 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 headquarters 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. (Grandpa'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.

Elisons built a frame house in town near the church, Harpers bought a place from Brackenbury. 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 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 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.

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.

### IMPROVEMENTS

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.

*Excerpt Elbert Durfee*