

ANOTHER CHAPTER ON RAFT RIVER HISTORY

SCOTT GAMBLE

The years have a sneaky way of creeping up on us and tiptoeing past unnoticed, maybe especially here in southern Idaho where so many relics of the pioneer past are still visible. But the old frontier days seem so close at hand. Don't the old-timers remember them? Well, not exactly.

Take, for example, Scott Gamble of Malta. Scott's an 85-year-old, born Oct. 8, 1876, in Elba, Idaho – “near Elba” would be more accurate, since Elba didn't exist then. You'd think Scott, of all people, would be able to tell you what it was “really like.”

And he can describe the old days, to an intent. But to get the real story, you'd have to ask someone like Scott's father, who passed away forty years ago at the age of 75.

What about the legendary Conner's Creek Massacre? “That was before my time,” Scott says.

What about the bustling days when big trail herds were being brought into the Raft River Valley? “The drives lasted until about 1874 or 1875,” Scott says. “That was before I was born. The country was getting settled up and they couldn't trail cattle any more. They had to ship ‘em in.”

It may be too late now to get ever again first-hand stories of the “old day's.” People like Scott Gamble are the ones who can tell us things that, a generation hence, we'll only be able to read in history books, if at all.

Scott's father has been called “the man who brought cattle to the Raft River Valley.” Born and raised Maryland, the elder Gamble came from a family that had a plantation and kept slaves. With the Civil War that mode of living was brought to a close, and Gamble headed West, first to St. Louis, then to Texas.

From Texas, and in the employ of a man named J.Q. Shirley, he brought the first cattle in to the Raft River Valley. This was in the fall of 1868. Shirley and Gamble brought 2,000 head to Fort Hall but lost a lot of them in the winter. The next spring Gamble brought the remaining head to the Raft River Valley. “except for a few milk cows, those were the first cattle in the valley,” Scott says today.

“My dad was like a lot of men then,” he adds, “he didn't talk much.” From stories he'd heard, though, Scott knows that his father made four trips herding cattle on the Texas trail. And rumors that those days weren't always full of peace and quiet seem verified by Scott. “A lot of men in those days packed the law on their hip.

Scott's father married in 1872 to a young lady who'd come to the Raft River Valley from Utah in 1872. Gamble settled down with her then near Elba to raise a family.

Scott was born in 1876 “there weren't more than a half-a-dozen settlers in the valley.” He had a brother and two sisters, one of whom is still living, in American Falls.

As a youngster, Scott says he lived mostly in cow camps. “That's all there was in this country for years and years was cattle,” he says.

Scott broke horses, too, which was part of a cowboy's job then, and his nose was broken any number of times when he was bucked off. Once a flying hoof split open his head, which was stitched up with a regular needle and thread, and then he was 23 he lost an eye to – of all things – a base ball.

Scott went to school in log cabins. With just a grade school education, though, he did all right for himself. In 1907 he had a job as foreman for a cattle operation down on Antelope Island in the great Salt Lake.

It was there he met his wife- to - be, Chrissy Backman. Her cousin was working for Scott on the Island and she'd come over for a visit. "He didn't strike me too well at first," Mrs. Gamble smiles, speaking of her husband. Why not? "Oh, he poked fun at me. I didn't want to go out on that island, and he was laughing at the fuss I made."

What was Scott like as a youth? "Well, every day he looks now just like he did then," Mrs. Gamble says. "Everybody liked him. He knew how to take charge of things."

The Gambles were married in 1907. It was shortly afterward that Scott shaved off his mustache for the first and only time in his life. Mrs. Gamble had gone for a buckboard ride with her sister-in-law, whose son was expected on the island. On her return, seeing a mustache-less Scott, she said, "There's your boy now. My doesn't he look like Scott!

"The really laughed at me for not knowing my own husband."

The Gambles took a vacation to Malta about then. It was Mrs. Gamble's first visit to Idaho. They took the railroad to Burley-which had board sidewalks and just a few buildings-and then a stage to Albion, Where Scott's Father met them.

"It was like a desert," Mrs. Gamble says, "but you get used to those things."

They returned to Antelope Island for two Years. There were a couple hundred Buffalo on the island but by then they were already so reduced in numbers as to be a novelty. Scott says the town "Sports" paid about \$200 a buffalo for the privilege of shooting them.

In 1909 they returned to Malta to stay. Scott didn't have a job waiting for him but he soon found one-as manager of the old Bar-M Ranch. "See, I never worked," he kids. "I just made the other guys word."

In those days, says Scott, there was more grass and less sage. Dry years and sheep changed that. There were ranch all along the stream.

Scott remembers Albion as the first town-founded about 1874. the Malta post office wasn't established until 1883. The big years for dry farming, he recalls, were 1910 and 1911, "but then they starved out. It wasn't until pumping started recently, that farming started again."

Scott's health seems good, he drove a car until he was 82. He's a little hard of hearing but has a firm step and hand-shake, and, obviously, an excellent memory.

The Gambles have had their hardships and got rich in memories. These they were gracious in offering to us, as a bridge, as it were to the past. Their family includes a daughter in California, three grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

This interview was taken in 1962 by Ron Abell.

It is reported by a nephew that Scott was the Second white child born in Cassia county. [My Grandmother Helen Louisa King was the first white child born in Cassia county at the E Y Ranch on Raft River.] Scott's Parents were living in a wagon box, probably at a cow camp when he was born. It was at a location south of the Connor creek store, near the shale rock slide.

Scott and Ether Parke were the best of friends there entire life. - I remember Scott working for my dad one spring, planting grain and harrowing with a small 8N Ford tractor. - Jay Ward

