

Bassett, History of Buffalo County

SPECIAL ELECTION, JANUARY 20, 1870

The special election for the reorganization of the County of Buffalo was held at the schoolhouse in Precinct No. 1, on Thursday, January 20, 1870.... county commissioners,... Edward Oliver.

FIRST REGULAR ELECTION

The first regular election in the county was held October 11, 1870.... county sheriff, John Oliver; county commissioners,... Edward Oliver.

John Oliver was appointed sheriff and assessor for Buffalo County at the first board meeting.... it appears that later James Oliver was appointed and served as assessor, thus being the first assessor in the county.

In 1867 there were eighteen tax payers,... Ed Oliver, \$335; Sarah Oliver, \$540;

It is related that in the western part of the county there were a few settlers who boasted that they had never been assessed and would not be and they would make it warm for anyone who attempted to assess their property. On this official trip the assessor was accompanied by his brother, John, the sheriff. When they arrived the few settlers at Elmcreek began making threats and firing their guns, but the Oliver brothers were not easily bluffed and replied that they had guns and could shoot if necessary, but that the assessment must be made and there was no use making a fuss about it. After a long parley the assessor was permitted to perform his official duty.

So far as can be recalled, the following are the names of persons and families residing at that date in what is now Buffalo County and most of whom gathered at Wood River Center on the occasion of this stampede [Indian scare]; J. E. Boyd and family, John Britt, George Burke, Crane brothers, Cook and family, H. Dugdale and family, Mrs. Francis and children, Huff and family, French George, Augustus Meyer and wife, Edward (Ted) Oliver and wife, James Oliver and family, Mrs. Sarah Oliver and her children, Robert, John, Sarah Ann, Jane and Eliza, Mrs. David Owen and son, Joseph Owen, Thomas Morgan and family, Payne and family, Thomas Peck and family, Jack Staats and family, Story and family, Tague and family, Mrs. Wilson and children, William Nutter and family....The female members of the Oliver and Owen families remained in Iowa for a year before returning to their Wood River homes. James Oliver, Thomas Morgan and others returned in time to gather the crops on their claims. Augustus Meyer, Edward (Ted) Oliver, George Burke and John Britt did not leave during the stampede, but remained to care for their property. They were not molested and saw no hostile Indians....two of the settlers, James Oliver and Thomas Morgan, were pressed into service to defend the fort, while their wives and children were left to the mercy of savage and barbarous Indians.

A BROKEN AXLE

The attention of travelers on the overland route over the Union Pacific Railroad is almost invariably drawn to an inviting farm scene in the Wood River valley of the Platte just west of the thriving Village of Shelton in Buffalo County, Neb. The first thing to attract attention is a large, roomy, up-to-date looking in all its appointments, farm house standing some twenty rods north of both the highway and the railroad which run parallel at this point. To add to the beauty of the scene, as a background lies Wood River with its border of native trees and their varying shades of green. Immediately south of the river are orchards--apple, plum, cherry and smaller fruits--and a garden, and scattered among the trees are "skips" of bees. A little north and west of the house is a large barn. To the north and east of the house beyond the orchard, in the bend of the river, are large corn cribs full and overflowing, and adjoining these are corrals, where in the winter time hundreds of sheep are fattened for

market. In front of the house is a well kept lawn extending down to the highway and bordered on either side with evergreen trees; to the east and west and across the railroad to the south are broad level acres of alfalfa, whose carpet of green is so restful to the eye from early spring to early winter, and when the four cuttings of hay, secured from these broad acres each year, are gathered and stored in stacks scattered over these acres, their size and number are indisputable evidence of the almost unlimited fertility of the soil.

So beautiful is this scene that the Union Pacific Railroad Company has reproduced it as an illustration, with the title, "A Typical Nebraska Ranch Home" and the illustration appeared in Union Pacific folders alongside that of their great Overland Limited passenger train, itself a marvel of comfort and luxury of modern railway travel. This beautiful home with its broad acres is that of Robert Oliver and his numerous family, and while greatly enjoyed by all the members of the family, it also adds in some measure to the pleasure and enjoyment of thousands of travelers who each year journey from ocean to ocean over this great overland route.

Possibly it may be of interest to relate a seemingly trivial incident which caused a large family to locate at this point while Nebraska was yet a territory and thus led to the creation of this and other comfortable, luxurious homes in Central Nebraska.

In the year 1860, Edward Oliver, Sr., his wife and seven children, one son married, converts to the Mormon faith left their home in England, their destination being Salt Lake City, Utah. At Florence, a few miles north of the City of Omaha, they purchased a traveling outfit for emigrants, which included two yoke of oxen, a wagon and two cows, and with numerous other families, having the same destination, took the Utah trail up the valley of the Platte on the north side of the river. When near a point known as Wood River Center, now Shelton, 175 miles west of the Missouri River, the front axle of their wagon gave way, compelling a halt for repairs, their immediate companions in the emigrant train continuing the journey, for nothing avoidable, not even the burial of a member of the train, was allowed to interfere with the prescribed schedule of travel, and the dead were buried during the hours devoted to camp purposes.

The Oliver family camped beside the trail and the broken wagon was taken to the ranch of Joseph Johnson who combined in his person and business that of postmaster, merchant, blacksmith, wagonmaker, editor and publisher of a newspaper, a Mormon with two or more wives and numerous children, a man passionately fond of flowers which he cultivated to a considerable extent, a philosopher, and it must be conceded a most useful person at a point so far distant from other source of supplies. The wagon shop of Mr. Johnson contained no seasoned wood suitable for an axle to the wagon and so from trees along Wood River was cut an ash from which was hewn and fitted an axle to the wagon and with the wagon thus repaired the family again took the trail, but ere ten miles had been traveled, the green axle began to bend under the load, the wheels ceased to track, the journey could not thus further proceed. In the family council which succeeded the father urged that they try to arrange with other emigrants to carry their movables and thus continue the journey. The mother suggested that the family return to the vicinity of Wood River Center and arrange to spend the winter. To the suggestion of the mother all the children added their entreaties. The mother urged that it was a beautiful country, an abundance of wood and good water, grass for pasture and hay in plenty could be made for their cattle and she was sure crops could be raised. The wishes of the mother prevailed, the family returned to a point about a mile west of Wood River Center and on the bank of Wood River constructed a habitation, a log hut with a sod and dirt roof, in which they spent the winter. When springtime came, the father, zealous in the Mormon faith, urged that they continue the journey to Utah. To this neither the mother nor any of the children could be induced to consent and in the end the father journeyed to Utah where he made his home to the end of his life. The married son made a home for his family not far distant. The mother, Sarah Oliver, became the head of the family and proved to be a woman of energy and force of character. With her children she engaged in the raising of corn and vegetables, the surplus being sold to emigrants passing over the trail, and at Fort Kearney, nearly twenty miles distant. The emigrants westbound usually had money to pay for vegetables, eggs and corn, but too often the emigrant westbound, who labeled his "prairie schooner" "Pike's Peak or Bust," returned later with his label

reading "Busted, by Gosh." Sarah Oliver never turned from her humble door a hungry emigrant, eastward or westward bound, and often she divided with such the scanty store needed for her own family. When rumors came of Indians on the warpath the children took turns on the housetop as lookout for the dreaded savages. In 1863 two settlers were killed a few miles east of this point. In 1864 occurred the memorable raid of the Cheyenne Indians in which horrible atrocities were committed and scores of settlers were massacred by these Indians only a few miles immediately south of this point on the south side of the Platte River. In 1865 A. W. Storer, a near neighbor, was murdered by Indians. Sarah Oliver had no framed diploma from some medical college which would entitle her to use the prefix "Dr." to her name, possibly she was not entitled to be called a trained nurse or mid-wife, but she is entitled to be long remembered as one who ministered to the sick, to early settlers along the trail, to travelers over the trail, and to many whose dwelling place was at or near Fort Kearney, many miles distant. Often the messenger from distressed families miles distant was "Pap" Lamb, whose home was near Grand Island, twenty-five miles to the east, and whose route as stage driver was from his home to Fort Kearney, and when this messenger came Sarah Oliver was accorded the seat of honor beside the driver.

Sarah Oliver and her family endured all the toil and privation incident to early settlers, without means, in a new country, far removed from access to what are deemed the barest necessities of life found in more settled communities. She endured all the terrors incident to settlement in a sparsely settled locality in which year after year Indian atrocities were committed and in which the coming of such savages was hourly expected and dreaded. She saw the building and completion of the Union Pacific Railroad near her home in 1866; she saw Nebraska become a state in 1867; in 1870 when Buffalo County was organized, her son, John, was appointed sheriff and was elected to that office at the first election thereafter. Her eldest son, James, was named the first assessor of the county, and her son, Edward, was a member of the first board of county commissioners and later served with credit and fidelity as county treasurer. When in 1871 Mrs. Sarah Oliver died, her son, Robert, inherited her old home and on that old home, established in 1860, is located "The Typical Nebraska Ranch Home" which an attempt has been made to describe.

EPHRAIM OLIVER.

Ephraim Oliver, who owns five hundred and eighty acres of good land in Shelton township, is one of the leading stock raisers of the county. He was born in Manchester, England, on the 14th of January, 1852, of the marriage of Edward and Sarah Oliver, both natives of that country. The year 1860 witnessed their emigration to America and they first settled in Buffalo county, Nebraska, but two years later the father removed to Salt Lake City, where his demise occurred. The mother passed away in this county.

Ephraim Oliver is one of a family of eleven children, of whom five are still living. His education was mainly acquired in the public schools of Buffalo county, Nebraska, as he was but eight years of age when the family settled here. He remained at home until he attained his majority and then purchased the old homestead on section 2, Shelton township, which he still owns. He has bought additional land and now holds title to five hundred and eighty acres, all of which is well improved. He raises some grain but devotes the greater part of his attention to stock raising and feeding and in 1915 fed one hundred head of steers and seven hundred head of sheep. He understands every phase of stock raising and also pays great attention to the marketing of his stock and the success which he has gained is well deserved.

On the 6th of April, 1875, Mr. Oliver was united in marriage to Miss Dorothy Fieldgrove, a daughter of William Henry and Margaret Fieldgrove, further mention of whom occurs elsewhere in this work. Mr. and Mrs. Oliver have eleven children: William E.; Walter E.; Edward H.; Cora, the wife of William J. Pierce; John E.; Chester Arthur and Charles A., twins; Howard L.; George H.; Vernon J.; and Dewey S.

Mr. Oliver indorses the policies of the republican party and loyally supports its candidates at the polls. For many years he has served as a member of the school board and during that time has done much to promote educational advancement in his district; The greater part of his life has been passed in the middle west and he possesses in a marked degree the qualities characteristic of this section, namely,

self-reliance, enterprise and the determination that overcomes obstacles, and he merits the title of a self-made man, for he began his career without capital or the aid of influential friends.

Buffalo Tales

The Mormon Trail: The Oliver Family of Shelton

by **Grace Oliver**

Forced to leave Illinois due to persistent harassment climaxing in the assassination of their prophets Joseph and Hiram Smith, the Mormons decided to leave the United States. Striking westward from Nauvoo in 1846, the lead elements established winter quarters on the bluffs above the west bank of the Missouri River, a site later to become Florence, Nebraska. The ensuing winter caused much suffering and loss of life to the Mormon vanguard. However, in the spring of 1847 some 150 persons under the leadership of Brigham Young were selected to find a home for their people. That summer the trail blazers set forth toward an unknown location in Mexican territory. Their course in Nebraska followed the Platte River from Fremont to Columbus where it branched off along the Loup River to the west edge of Merrick County, then south to the Platte, and from there on the north side of the Platte and North Platte Rivers into Wyoming. Later contingents followed a shorter route, taking them along the north side of the Platte Rivers all the way through Nebraska.

The most characteristic way to travel along the Mormon Trail was by covered wagon, although some of the Mormons, too poor to afford wagons, moved all their possessions across the plains and mountains to Utah in two-wheeled carts drawn by hand. To protect themselves from Indians and other dangers, most of the emigrants went west in large companies. Their day's activities began at sun-up or before. The men corraled the oxen, which had been turned out to graze overnight, while the women prepared breakfast over campfires. After breakfast, the men yoked the oxen, hitched them to the wagons, and were ready for the captain's call to march when each wagon took its place in line. With only a brief meal and rest at noon, the wagon train made about fifteen miles a day. At the end of the day, the wagons formed into a great circle, and a guard was posted throughout the night. It was to join in this adventure that the Oliver family came to Nebraska territory on their way to Zion.

Edward Oliver, Sr., his wife Sarah and their seven children, converts to the Mormon faith, left their home in Manchester, England, for Salt Lake City via the port of Liverpool. Their children were Edward, Jr., age 28; James D., 21; Sarah Ann, 13; John, 12; Eliza, 9; Ephriam, 8; and Jane, a baby. James D. was the only married child, with a wife and one son Harry, 6 months old. They arrived in the United States in April 1860. At Florence (the old winter quarters) a few miles north of Omaha, the Oliver family purchased a traveling outfit for emigrants, which included two yoke of oxen, a wagon, and two cows. With numerous other Mormon families having the same destination, they took the Mormon Trail up the valley of the Platte River. About the 4th of July, 1860, the axle of their wagon gave way and the Olivers were compelled to halt for repairs at a point known as Wood River Center, while their immediate traveling companions continued the journey. The Olivers took their problem to the ranch of Joseph E. Johnson, a resourceful Mormon living in the area.

Joseph Johnson, husband of two or three wives and father of numerous children, was postmaster, merchant, blacksmith, wagon maker, baker, editor and publisher of a newspaper called *The Huntsman's Echo*. He was very fond of flowers and cultivated a beautiful garden. The wagon shop of Mr. Johnson contained no seasoned wood suitable for an axle, and so from the trees along the Wood River was cut an ash from which an axle was hewn and fitted to the wagon, and the family again took to the trail.

Ten miles had not yet been traveled when the green axle began to bend under the load, the wheels ceased to track, and the party could not proceed. In the family council which followed, the father

suggested that they try to arrange with other emigrants to carry their equipment and thus continue their journey. The mother thought they should return to Wood River Center (now Shelton) and arrange to spend the winter. She said it was beautiful country with an abundance of wood, good water, grass and hay for the cattle. As all the children agreed with their mother, the family returned to a point about a mile west of Wood River Center, where they constructed a log hut with a sod and dirt roof in which they spent the winter. With the coming of spring, the father, devoted to the Mormon faith, urged that they continue on to Salt Lake, but to this neither the mother nor any of the children would consent. So the father, with the 22-year-old maid who had accompanied the family from England, traveled on to Utah where they married and had a family of six daughters and one son. Edward, Sr. farmed near Salt Lake City, and family tradition tells us that he founded the town of Bountiful at or near the location of his farm, where he lived until his death in 1876.

Sarah Holland Oliver thus became the head of the family, and the Oliver homestead was established on the banks of the Wood River. She proved to be a woman of energy and force of character and, with her family, was soon engaged in raising corn and vegetables, selling the surplus to the emigrants along the trail, and at Fort Kearny twenty miles distant. She endured all the hardships, privations, work and fear that was the lot of early settlers of the frontier, yet she never turned a hungry emigrant from her humble door. Sarah Oliver, while she had no medical training, was ever ready to go to the help of those in need, and often ministered to the sick, weary and footsore travelers along the trail. When rumor came of Indians on the warpath, her children took turns on the housetop as lookout for the dreaded savages. In the Indian uprising of 1864, many of the people left Wood River Center, traveling as far east as Iowa, and some of them stayed away a year for safety's sake. Many of the men who left returned to harvest crops in the fall.

In the years to come Sarah witnessed the building of the Union Pacific Railroad past the homestead, the entrance of Nebraska into the Union in 1867, and the beginnings of the extensive settlement and development of central Nebraska. Here her family put down its roots.

The eldest son, Edward, Jr., married, and for two years worked for Mr. Johnson in Wood River Center, and later established his own general store when Mr. Johnson moved on to Utah in August of 1861. Edward, Jr. had no children. James D. with his wife and child established their home one mile west of the rest of the family, living in a dugout until they could construct a house. Seven more children were born to him and his wife. Sarah Ann married Joseph Owen, whose family came from England in 1863. They settled in Buffalo County, and were the parents of seven children. Mr. Owen was active in early affairs of the county, and served as treasurer of School District No. 1 for 46 years. John was appointed sheriff when Buffalo County was organized in 1870. He was elected to that office at the first election, and lost his life in October of 1871 at the age of 23 in the performance of the duties of that office.

Eliza, at 20 and unmarried, died in 1871, the same year that her mother and her brother John died. All three were buried on the Oliver homestead. Ephriam, who was eight years old when the family settled here, married Dorothy Fieldgrove, and they raised a family of ten boys and one girl. His son, Dewey S. Oliver, is the only member of this family now living [in 1978]. He resides in Shelton with his daughter Shirley. Jane, the youngest, was the only one to leave Buffalo County. She married Jacob Rice and moved to Spokane, Washington, where they reared a family of two girls and five boys.

When Sarah Oliver died, her youngest son Ephriam, who was better known as Bob, inherited the homestead. In the 1890's he built a beautiful farm home where his son's widow, Mrs. Vernon Oliver, now lives. In early 1900's the Union Pacific Railroad designated this as *The Typical Nebraska Ranch Home*, and an illustration of it appeared in Union Pacific folders of that day. Many descendants of Sarah Oliver live in Buffalo County today, largely in the Shelton area. She is remembered by all as a

courageous and persevering woman, who suffered and survived the pioneer hardships, and saw her family grow up in this "beautiful country" on the east edge of Buffalo County.

Oliver Family

English family - Converted to Mormon faith

Edward Oliver, Sr.,

Sarah, his wife seven children – (one source says they had 11)

Ed, Jr. (28), James (21), Sarah Ann (13), John (12), Eliza (9), Ephriam, called Bob (8), Jane (baby)
one daughter-in-law (James wife)

one grandson - Harry

maid, (22) ,may have been related

1860 - Left England – Arrived in US in April

Arrived in Florence, bought outfit – wagon, 2 yoke of oxen, 2 cows

Wood River Center (ca. July 4)- front axle broke - halt for repairs,

Mr. Johnson wagon shop - no seasoned wood

Wood River - ash

10 miles - green axle began to bend –

Father - try to arrange with other emigrants to carry their movables and continue the journey.

Mother - return to the vicinity of Wood River Center and arrange to spend the winter.

Children – agreed with Mother

Returned to about a mile west of Wood River Center and on the bank of Wood River

Constructed a log hut with a sod and dirt roof

Spent the winter.

Spring - father, zealous in the Mormon faith, urged that they continue the journey to Utah.

Mother & children chose to stay

Father went to Utah

Married the maid

Had 7 more children

Wrote for Sarah to come join him

Lived there for the rest of his life.

Rumors came of Indians on the warpath - the children took turns on the housetop as lookout

Female members of family went to Iowa for a year in 1864 during Indian uprising

Men stayed to harvest crops

Sarah Oliver –

Ministered to the sick early settlers, travelers on the trail, and to many at or near Fort Kearney.

Often traveled by stagecoach, seated beside the driver

Raised corn & vegetables – sold to Ft. Kearny & travelers

Saw the building and completion of the Union Pacific Railroad near her home in 1866

Saw Nebraska become a state in 1867

Died in 1871 – buried on homestead

Oliver Children

Edward – Ran store in Shelton
Member of the first board of county commissioners
Later was county treasurer.
Married, no children

John - Appointed sheriff in 1870 when Buffalo County was organized
Elected sheriff first election thereafter.
Died in Oct. 1871, “in performance of his duties” Age 23
Buried on Homestead by mother

James - Named the first assessor of the county
Homesteaded mile west of Sarah
Had 7 more children

Story - Western part of the county - a few settlers who boasted they had never been assessed

Would not be - Would make it warm for anyone who attempted to assess their property.

Official trip the assessor (James) accompanied by brother, John, the sheriff.

A few settlers at Elmcreek began making threats and firing their guns,

Oliver brothers were not easily bluffed

Replied that they had guns and could shoot if necessary, but that the assessment must be made and there was no use making a fuss about it.

After a long parley the assessor was permitted to perform his official duty.

Sarah Ann – married Joseph Owen (came with family from England in 1863)
Had 7 children
Joseph – Treasurer of Dist. 1 for 46 years

Eliza – died in 1871 – Buried on homestead with mother and John

Jane – only one to leave Nebraska
Married Jacob Rice
Moved to Spokane, Washington
7 children

Ephriam (Bob) inherited Oliver homestead
Married Dorothy Fieldgrove
Had 11 children: 10 boys, 1 girl.

William E.
Walter E.
Edward H.
Cora, married William J. Pierce

John E.
Chester Arthur and Charles A., twins
Howard L
George H.

Vernon J
Dewey S.