

Libbie Norton Lewis

1864 – 1940

This is the life story of Libbie Norton Lewis, pioneer and long-time resident of this area. It was written by her granddaughter, the present Dorthea Heitz, in 1940, before Mrs. Lewis' last illness. She died at her daughter Ethel's home in Worland, Wyoming, on September 23, 1940. Libbie, all of her life had lived the life of a pioneer, and learned to make the most of what she had.

Libbie Norton Lewis, Grandmother Lewis smiles reminiscently as her mind wanders back over the interesting incidents of her life.

"I was born near Rochester, Minnesota, in 1863," she says, "just a year before the close of the Civil War.

"Ever since the Revolutionary War, when one of my great-grand uncles fought in the war for freedom, my people have helped to make United States history. Several of my uncles fought in the Civil War, and not only my parents, but also my grandparents had the pioneer spirit. So of course it was only natural that my parents moved to Memphis, Missouri when I was only two years old. My father, Isaiah Norton, was a millwright and something of an inventor, so most of the farming which was done on the place near Memphis was done by my oldest brother, Orlando, who was fourteen years older than I. My three sisters, Teressa, Ulyssia, and Ella, and I helped with the many duties required in a household in those days. I especially remember helping to spin carpet warp.

I started school in Memphis at a small one room school house taught by an old maid school teacher. There I learned readin', ritin', and 'rithmetic, history, geography and astrology. But goodness, we didn't bother about such things as "grades," like they do now. School was just school.

When I was fifteen, our family again started west to Nebraska, where they planned to homestead land. My brother-in-law, Morris, was planning to take fifty or sixty head of cattle along, besides five or six wagon loads of farm implements and household goods. Along with my sister and her husband, were my parents, my grandmother and grandfather Norton, my younger brother, Frank, several nieces and nephews, John Lewis (the handsome young neighbor boy who worked for my brother-in-law), and myself. So you see there was quite a caravan of us.

Of course this was a long slow journey, since the horses couldn't go very fast while pulling the heavily loaded wagons, and we often had to stop a couple of days to rest the little new-born calves.

One day we stopped on the outskirts of a little town along the Elk River. These stops gave us a chance to relax and go fishing. That night when we were all in bed a terrible wind came up. I was in bed with my little niece, Gertrude Morris, when the wind began, but we rushed out of the wagon, frightened by the storm. It was a terrible cyclone, and not only did it upset wagons and scatter household goods, but the cattle were going on. My grandpa and grandma Norton were picked clear off their bed, but luckily were not hurt. A big wagon box had blown over on top of them. Ordinarily we would not have been able to move such a big box, but under the stress of so much excitement, the box was lifted without too much effort. John finally succeeded in quieting down the cattle by cracking a long whip, but the whole family found their sleep entirely disrupted for the night. All the wagons but the one with the stoves in it had been upset. There was no

shelter of any kind, and rain had started falling in torrents. We children found some carpet to put over us, but it just succeeded in making us wetter and colder, since the rain soaked right through it.

The next morning finally came and we were able to see to what an extent damage had been done. One house in the town had blown over, and of course our household goods was scattered all over the country. Then we had some bumps and bruises, but of course in those days people didn't go to the doctor with every little scratch and bruise.

We finally got all of our wagons righted, and our stuff gather up, and we were on our way again.

Several other incidents occurred along the way. At one time we had to stop along the Missouri River for a couple of days while our stuff was ferried across. At another time we met a family from Texas who were also going to Nebraska. Mr. Fulton was taking a large herd of cattle along and so his wife not only had to take care of two small children, but she had to drive the wagon. They were glad to put their cattle in with ours and join forces with us.

We made our first settlement in the little Loup Valley. Broken Bow was the nearest town, and it was thirty miles away. My father homesteaded 160 acres of land, my brother-in-law took up 200, and the Fultons also homesteaded. That fall John's folks also came out and homesteaded land too.

We hadn't been there long when the Olive Raid started. That fall my father had to go as a judge to see about the raid and he was gone several days. On his return home he discovered that a prairie fire had started. He got home ahead of the fire, and that night the whole family fought fire all night long.

When I was seventeen I married John Lewis. For about four years we lived in Sargent, Nebraska, and farmed. Then we moved to Chadron, Nebraska, where John did carpentry work. My twins, Claudia and Walter, were born there, but Walter was burned to death in an accident. Nellie, Perle, and Leon were also born there.

When Leon was still a small baby we started for Wyoming. That was in 1893. The journey from Nebraska was a long trip in a covered wagon and took several months.

One incident of the trip especially stands out in my mind. We had camped for the night someplace near what is now Lost Cabin, where many notorious Hole-in-the Wall outlaws had their headquarters. It was a dark stormy night and we had just gone to bed when we heard a confusion among the horses. John went out to see what was causing the disturbance and he was confronted by some of these outlaws who told him to "stick 'em up."

"Well," John said, "I'm just one helpless man against all of you, and of course you can take my horses if you want to. I have a wife and seven small children asleep in the wagon and scarcely enough supplies left to get to Paintrock. If you take my horses, we will probably all starve to death because we will be stranded out here with no possible way to get supplies." The bandits turned away, ashamed of themselves. I am thankful that bandits in those days had more chivalry than they now have.

The first year in Wyoming, we lived at the Rhinehart's Sawmill at Paintrock. That winter, a little baby girl was born and died. We later moved to what is now the Berch Warner place. We lived there for quite a while. During this time, my daughter Edith was born.

But the wanderlust seized us again, and when some real estate men came by and told John how he could become rich raising pigs in Arkansas, we again loaded up our wagons and started, with the Lou McCreery family, for Arkansas. When we got to Oklahoma, John's uncle William tried to persuade us to stay there, saying that it would be foolish to expect any success in such a venture, but we refused to give up the idea. However, my oldest son, Willie, decided he didn't want to go on, and so he his the horses out. Of course we didn't know this, and as we thought they had strayed off, we spent two or three days hunting for them. But they were finally found.

It turned out that John's uncle was right, for the pigs were just razor-backs, and there was no possibility of making any money. We were there six months, in which time Cicero was born. Then, discouraged, we again started back for Wyoming. The trip back was a nightmare. John had malaria fever and was forced to stay in bed. When we got to Oklahoma, where we planned to rest a while, Perle got dropsy and the doctor said we would have to get out of the south immediately if we wanted him to live. The first winter we came back was the hardest we ever lived through. We were broke, the family was all sick, and things looked pretty blue.

But the next spring we traded two horses for relinquishments on what is now the W. O. Lewis place on Lower Norwood. Here for a number of years we lived. Three of my girls, Alice, Hazel and Fannie, were all born here. Here most of the children grew up and were married.

In March, 1914, death was to deal us a blow when my husband was taken from me, after having suffered for a long time from cancer.

The next year death again occurred in the family, when my daughter Claudia, who was now married to Bert Allen, died, leaving five small children.

When war broke out, one of my sons, Leon, was sent to France. He served on or near the front lines until the end of the war, but returned home strong and healthy.

Later I sold the ranch to my oldest son, Willie, and built a house in Ten Sleep. But the desire for new scenes once again called me, and I moved to Spokane, Washington with my younger children. I bought a little farm near Spokane, and have lived with my youngest son, Cicero, until the last year, when I again moved back to my children in Wyoming because of ill health."

Children of Libbie and John Lewis:

William Ozro: Born Nov. 26, 18882 at Sargent, Nebraska. Married Stella Johnson (deceased). Now lives in Ten Sleep, Wyo. [with son Roy]

Ethel May: Born Jan. 17, 18885 at Sargent, Nebraska. Married William Roland Hankins (deceased). Married Blaine Townsend. Now lives at Worland, Wyoming.

Claudia Ulyssia: Born Apr. 17, 1887 at Chadron, Nebraska. Married Bert Allen. Died Jan. 28, 1917.

Walter Conrad: Born April 17, 1887 at Chadron, Nebraska. Died Jan. 28, 1888.

Nellie Agnes: Born March 5, 1889 at Chadron, Nebr. Married Sam Brandt. Died 1973.

Perle Mortimer: Born Feb. 18, 1891 at Chadron, Nebraska. Married Mae Sheesley. Died Mar. 31, 1954.

Leon Isaiah: Born Aug. 11, 1892 at Chadron, Nebraska. Married Laura Griffin (divorced). Married Bertha (unknown). Now lives at Klamath Falls, Oregon.

Ruth: Born Sept. 28, 1894 at Hyattville, Wyoming. Died Dec. 11, 1894.

Edith Blanche: Born Dec. 17, 1896 at Ten Sleep, Wyoming. Married Ernest Allen. Died May, 1966.

Cicero Henry: Born March 3, 1898 at Siloam Springs, Arkansas. Married Verna McCreery. Died about 1970.

Alice Grace Belle: Born July 12, 1900 at Ten Sleep, Wyoming. Married Nobel Pickett. Died about 1970.

Hazel Clara: Born Mar. 4, 1903 at Ten Sleep, Wyoming. Married Ray Hamblock (deceased). Married James Good, Now lives at Eureka, Calif.

Frances Abigail: Born Mar. 20, 1907 at Ten Sleep, Wyoming. Married Arthur Haga. Now lives at Bandon, Oregon.

SOURCE: A History of Washakie County As Written by Its People, A Washakie County Bicentennial Project, 1976, printed by Northern Wyoming Daily News, Worland, Wyoming, 89-91.

Lewis reunion, Northern Wyoming Daily News, Worland, Wyoming, 24 Oct. 1984, page 9.

A Lewis family reunion was held at the home of Irma Howard in Worland beginning at noon, Sunday, Sept. 30. The occasion was prompted by the visit of Hazel Good from Eureka, Calif., and Frances Haga of Brandon, Ore. The two are sisters of Ethel Townsend.

Local families attending were: Mr. and Mrs. William Sinn, Lial Sinn, Mae Lewis, Dorothea Heitz, Elnora Stratton and Ethel Townsend.

Out of town guests were: Mrs. Norma Quinones, Tito and Mandi, and Mrs. Norma Yoos, Casper; Mr. and Mrs. Ray Tolman and Mrs. Bertha Lewis, Buffalo; Mrs. Jean Short, Wheatland; Mrs. Florence H. Ellis, Medicine Bow; Mr. and Mrs. Alan Todd, Travis, Nathan and Julia, Upton; Mr. and Mrs. Jerry R. Lewis, Basin; Mr. and Mrs. Bob Titus, Shoshoni; Mr. and Mrs. Jack Stephenson, Kendra and Courtney, Newcastle; Hazel Good, Eureka, Calif.; and Francis Haga, Brandon, Ore.

Resident of Tensleep 48 Years Dies

Mrs. Libby Lusinda Lewis, 76, who pioneered in Tensleep 48 years ago, died at the home of her daughter, Mrs. Roland Hankins, Monday afternoon, following a year's illness.

Mrs. Lewis was born Aug. 27, 1864 and at the age of 28 came to Tensleep where she lived until eight years ago when she moved to Spokane, Wash. She returned a year ago, however, and has since lived with her daughter. Her husband died in 1915.

Surviving her are six daughters, Mrs. Roland Hankins; Mrs. Ern Allen of Tensleep; Mrs. Ray Hamblock of San Francisco, Calif.; Mrs. Arthur Haga of Bandon, Ore.; Mrs. Noble Pickett of Yakima, Wash., and Mrs. Sam Brandt of McFadden; and four sons, W. O. Lewis and Pearl Lewis of Tensleep and Cicero and Leon Lewis of Spokane, Wash.

Funeral services, though not definitely set, are expected to be Wednesday.

Northern Wyoming Daily News 9/24/1940