

JOHN W. SHAWCROFT - HIS STORY

“There is a perennial nobleness, and even sacredness
in work . . . There is always hope in a man who
actually and earnestly works.”

Thomas Carlyle

The life of John William Shawcroft spanned a few days less than ninety years. During that long life many marvelous inventions appeared - inventions which John considered with awe, wonderment and gratitude for the progress made since his humble beginning. No doubt as he traveled across the country in a jet airplane, he remembered his first journey - a six-week trek in a covered wagon. He always considered it a great privilege to live during the time that he did.

It all began with his birth on December 13, 1874 in the little town of Fountain Green, Utah. His father, John Shawcroft, had emigrated from England at the age of seventeen, and his mother, Maria Jensen, had emigrated from Denmark at the age of nine. Their parents were converts to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormon), and though in humble circumstances, they had forsaken their homelands to join other members of the Church in Utah. The harshness of pioneer life taught them the necessity for work and, indeed, the love of work. As their children came along, they were taught to work and to value their work. John was twenty-seven and Maria twenty-two years of age at the time of the birth of their first child, John William, who was named for his father and paternal grandfather.

The Shawcroft home in Fountain Green was a simple and small frame house. John's first playmates were his cousins, the children of Andrew and Annie Jensen Aagard, especially James Aagard who was just one month younger than John, and Niels Peter Aagard who was born 28 Sept., 1876. As a young boy, John was taught to do “chores”, and he soon became acquainted with all of the work pertaining to farming. He also ran errands for his grandparents, William and Ann Hunt Shawcroft, who lived nearby in a log house. William had been injured in a mining accident in England and could not work. John never recalled a great deal of his early childhood, but said that he was always busy.

When John was seven years old, his father received a call from the President of the Church, President John Taylor, to leave Fountain Green and go to southern Colorado to assist in the colonization of that area. What an exciting time this was for John, his sister Maralda, and three-year old brother Nathan! There was a lot to do to get ready for the journey. First they had to dispose of their property in Fountain Green. Letters received from Thor N. Peterson, a friend of the Shawcrofts, who had gone to Manassa, Colorado, about a year and one-half previously, indicated that the country in the San Luis valley in Colorado appeared to be good country for livestock. Peterson encouraged them to bring as many cattle as they could.

Consequently, when the Company started out from Fountain Green it was accompanied by forty head of cattle plus some milk cows.

In recalling the journey to Colorado, John wrote the following:

“I do not remember very much about the trip to Colorado as I was very young. I can’t recall the date we started, but it must have been about the middle of July, 1882. There were ten wagons in the company (in another place it states that there were eleven wagons). The Company consisted of the John Shawcroft family, James Jensen (my mother’s brother) family, Jim Nielson family, James Berthelsen family, John Guymon (son-in-law of Jim Nielson), Tom and John Morgan, Chris Bogue (Uncle Jim’s brother-in law), and Jim Madsen, who worked for my Dad., the Cornum family from Fairview was also in the company. One of the first things that they did was to choose a Captain to make any necessary decisions and James Berthelsen was chosen for that position. John Morgan, one of the Cornum boys and sometimes young Jimmie Nielson drove the cattle. One thing I remember well was that on our first days travel, when we were in the mountains above Fountain Green going down a hill over a very poor road, Pa’s wagon tipped over. No one was badly hurt, but this accident made Ma very nervous and afraid on the whole trip.”

In his memoirs John did not mention anything about the heat or the bleakness of the country, but anyone driving through that country now in mid-summer can well imagine the discomfort caused by the heat and the roughness of the terrain. There was a road of sorts all the way, but it was a poor road and very rough. John further recalled:

“On the route we traveled there were very few settlements or people along the way. We went through Castle Valley to the Green River and then on to the Grand River (now called the Colorado River). There were no bridges on these two large rivers and I think the most dreaded and dangerous things on our trip were the fording and getting the cattle across those two rivers. I do not know how to describe just where we crossed these rivers only to say that on the Green River it was south a considerable distance from where the railroad crosses the river now. We crossed the Grand River down below where Moab is now - just before the river goes into a box canyon. Sometimes, where there was plenty of feed and water, we would stop for a day or two for the cattle to rest. We had several milk cows among the cattle that supplied us with milk and I remember that the way they made butter was to put the cream in a can, put it on the wagon, and when they stopped at noon the butter would be churned by the jolt of the wagon on the rough road. The first place I remember in Colorado was Durango., There, for the first time, I saw the railroad and trains. From there we came by Pagosa Springs, then to Chama over Cumbres pass to the Los Pinos Creek. We came down that creek to Big Horn and then over into the Valley on the Conejos River above San Rafael and on down to Conejos. I remember that Pa was disappointed and said we had been traveling up and down but did not come down much and the Mexicans were cutting their wheat with sickles and cradles and it was badly frozen. From there we came on to Manassa, stayed there a few days and then came to where

Brother Peterson, his son-in-law, Thomas Crowther, and Wallace Young were settled about one mile east of where the town of Richfield was later located. The Cornum family went on to the town of Ephraim where the Heiselt family and others from Utah had settled. And so the long trip that took six weeks was ended.”

It was the first week in September when the Company reached its destination, so from then on it was rush, rush, rush to prepare homes for the winter. The settlers lived in tents until cabins were built. John’s memoirs continue:

“One of the first things done was to survey the town site of Richfield and to lay it out in blocks and lots and to assign them to those who were going to settle there. The next thing was to go to the mountains and get logs to build houses. All of the houses were made of logs as no other building material was available. It took three days to make a trip as the logs were hauled from the Torcido Creek country where our cattle range is at present. In addition to houses, it was necessary to build stables, corrals, fences, sheds, etc. Hay for the horses was gotten down on the Head Ranch. I think they bought it, but it was very poor in quality. The whole country was open - no fences - and the cattle were turned down on the La Jara Creek where they remained all winter. By the time it snowed, we had moved from the tents into the cabins. All of the land was covered with rabbit brush and greasewood. Our people knew nothing about railing brush and the only way they could clear the land was to grub out the brush with a grubbing hoe. The brush was piled in big piles with pitchforks and burned. That was the big winter job. Then there were lots to fence and the land to be fenced - all with poles and posts obtained from the mountains. Ditches had to be made. I have since been amazed at how so much work was done under the circumstances, but they did it and raised a crop that first year (1883) Up to that time there had been no ripe wheat harvested in that area, but Pa raised a little over 600 bushels of good ripe wheat that year besides oats and feed. Ever since we drove the cattle from Utah, I have been interested in livestock. Our cattle were turned loose on the range to mix with other cattle, and from the time I could ride a horse, I looked after the cattle. There was no town of Sanford then and for several years I herded the cattle over open country as far east as the Conejos River, also north and west of Richfield. I rode bareback as Pa was afraid to let me ride with a saddle because he was afraid I would get my foot hung in the stirrup and have an accident.”

Colorado had been made a state in 1876 and the land where the settlement of Richfield was situated was purchased from the State of Colorado for \$1.15 per acre. The people of Richfield all went together to make fences. The land, although different plots belonged to different people, was all fenced together. Thor Peterson and others had built a ditch from the Conejos River to Richfield in 1882. This ditch was later enlarged and it supplied irrigation water for the new settlement. It was known as the Richfield Canal and it is still in use today. John wrote further:

“When I came here there was not a house, ditch or fence between Guadalupe and

Alamosa. Only the water tank and section house were situated by the railroad where La Jara is now. The railroad had been built in 1880. A little further west where Dan Newcomb and others lived, there were some houses and farms up that way, but from Alamosa to Guadalupe there was nothing but brush. There were no roads. The main road went along west of the railroad across the prairie until it got to about where Estrella is, then it crossed the track and went on to Alamosa where we did our trading. I have often been asked why we did not take up some of the good land west, south and north of Richfield, but the Mormons were not encouraged to branch out a whole lot. There was a lot of good land available for several years after we came here. The people could not see what was in the future and they worked together on a small scale and got their land that way. When we came here there was a lot of Mexican people here. Some at what is now Capulin and a lot more of them at Conejos and all along the Conejos River. How they lived, I don't know. Mrs. Young said they used to live on jack rabbits. They had no grain at all. The grain all froze the year we came here."

In 1886, the Shawcroft family became very frightened. One of the authorities had come from Utah and suggested that, because the land at the settlement of Ephraim was very poor in quality, the people from Ephraim move to a bench of land farther north and establish a new settlement to be called Sanford. The people of Richfield were advised to move to Sanford and join with the people from Ephraim in the new settlement. This was a blow to the Shawcrofts who had been uprooted in recent years and had become comfortably settled at Richfield. John's father and mother were firm believers in obeying and following the counsel of the Church leaders. They talked it over and, no doubt, prayed about it, and finally decided to meet with the next general authority who came for quarterly conference and explain the situation. On that Saturday when John's father left in his wagon to go to Manassa and meet with the visiting brother, he told the children to watch for him when he came home. He said if he came with his wagon empty, they would have to move to Sanford, and if there was a load on the wagon, they would not have to move. Anxiously the children watched all day for the wagon to come. When they finally saw it coming down the road, they rushed out to meet it and saw that it was loaded with large rocks. The brother from Utah had advised them to stay where they were, since they had a large family of boys who would be needing land and there was more room there for expansion. Also, the fact that Richfield was such a short distance from Sanford was taken into consideration. The children rejoiced that they did not have to move, and the rocks that their father had brought that day were used to make the foundation of their two-story brick home which was built a few years later. Some of the Richfield settlers moved to Sanford including the Thor Peterson family and the Berthelsens. For a time Richfield was reduced from the status of a ward to a branch (of the Sanford ward). However, as time went on other people moved into Richfield and Thor Peterson moved back from Sanford, so that in the 1890's Richfield once again became a ward.

When Richfield was first settled there was a big problem with the drinking water. It came from surface wells dug from about ten to twenty feet deep. It was strong with alkali and very hard. It was drawn from the wells by a rope and bucket. There was a small spring in the northeast part of town, but it did not supply enough water for all. When the town of La Jara

grew up around the railroad water tank, an artesian well was dug there on the corner by the old Catholic church. John's father drilled the second artesian well in the area and the first at Richfield. Thereafter, the Shawcrofts never lacked for pure, cold water. John later wrote:

“The winters were not too severe. Our cattle wintered down south in the flag country. We did not have any hay. The cattle survived and when we got the fields fenced, then the cattle were kept in there in the winter time too. We used to have a big flour bin. When we did go to the mill (at Conejos) we would unload wheat and take a big supply of flour. We exchanged wheat for flour. There was no system of buying things as there was not much money at that time. Our necessities were purchased at Gertison's (?) Store in Alamosa. After La Jara was settled in 1884 we took eggs and butter to the stores there for trade. We lived and got along. We never had a crop failure in Richfield.”

Because John was the eldest boy in the family, he never got to go to school very much. The first school was held in the log meetinghouse with Mrs. Wallace Young as teacher. He once stated that his education might be the equivalent of a sixth grade education today. This was something he always regretted. He was good in arithmetic, but recalled that his grammar and spelling were very bad. This weakness is reflected in journals and other memoirs which he kept, although his handwriting was fairly good. He once remarked, “What I lacked in schooling, I made up for in work, and I always had plenty to do, and I liked doing it.” He also recalled:

“We did not have much recreation in early Richfield. There was too much work to do. What we had we made ourselves. The log church house was built the first winter that we were here. I remember Pa saying that they all turned out and went to the mountains to get logs for the church house. They got home during a big snow so they got the logs out just in time. They had parties, socials, programs, as well as church meetings there. We had many good times there. I remember when I was a young boy, I tried to sing a song at some meeting. That was the biggest flop I ever had. The brick school house was built before the brick church house. The bricks were all made out north of La Jara and Richfield. The Dodds made them. They made them out of mud, warmed them up and let them dry and burned them. All of the brick houses and church houses were made that way. None of them were imported bricks like we have today, but many of those old houses are still standing. Pa gave me responsibility because I was the eldest. One time, he heard a rumor that the banks were going to fail, so he sent me to Alamosa to draw his money out of the bank there. I went on horseback and came home with \$900.00 in gold in the saddle bags. Another time, he had me drive several other ladies and Ma to Alamosa in the buggy. In crossing the bridge over the ditch near La Jara, the horses got spooked somehow and they ran away. The women were sure scared, but I was more frightened than anyone. When I was eighteen years old. Pa went into the sheep business and I spent a lot of time looking after the sheep. I also did a lot of irrigating and worked on the threshing machine besides all of the regular farm work.”

When John was 21 years old he was called on a church mission to the Southern States. He was the second missionary from Richfield ward, and he departed for that mission on Dec. 1895. He recalled the following:

“I first went to Salt Lake where I went through the temple and was set apart for my mission. After arriving in Chattanooga, I was assigned to the Middle Tennessee Conference. I think I was about as backward and unprepared for a mission as anyone who had ever been sent to the mission field. Elias S. Kimball, a son Heber C. Kimball, was president of the Southern States mission and Edgar A. Young, a son of Brigham Young, was president of our conference. President Kimball was very strong on traveling without purse or scrip, so most of all our work was done walking and with very little money to spend for food or lodging. My first companion was Elder Heber Hickenlooper from Utah.”

Throughout his life, John expressed many times his high regard for President Elias S. Kimball. He thought he was a very fine person and tried many times to find out what happened to him in later years. The following item in his journal expresses his esteem for President Kimball:

“Sunday June 28, 1896. Did not eat any breakfast. Went to priesthood meeting at seven o’clock in the morning which convened until ten o’clock when the public meeting started. We all had dinner with the Saints under some large trees which was a very enjoyable time. Went to meeting again at two o’clock. There was a very large crowd out. The house was packed full. President Kimball did most of the preaching. He told the people that we would preach on Cane Creek (where two elders had been killed) and have churches there inside of three years. After the meeting we had another priesthood meeting. When we got through giving our reports, I went with Elder Ashcroft and stayed over night with Mr. John Leek. The next day (Monday) we had another priesthood meeting a seven o’clock A.M. where President Kimball preached to us until twelve o’clock without stopping. We then had dinner under the trees. At one o’clock, President Kimball started in again and gave it to us for about two hours. Then he had us all get up and bear our testimonies. It was the best meeting I ever attended and President Kimball was indeed blessed with the Spirit of the Lord.

The following excerpts from John’s journal are typical of his mission and show clearly the many problems he encountered while traveling without purse or scrip. At the end of each day, he gave the number of meals eaten and the number of miles walked. He also gave the number of tracts handed out. He abbreviated the names of these tracts and since we are not familiar with them, these have been omitted from the entries. One appears to have been THE VOICE OF WARNING, and another THE JOSEPH SMITH STORY, but there were others.

Jan. 17, 1896 - Weather fine. Called at a house where the man stuttered very bad and one of the dirtiest places that I ever got into - that was the worst. They had to go to their neighbors

for knives and forks to eat with. While we were asking the blessing, the chickens were cackling in the house so we could hardly hear what was said. We tried to eat, but it did not take us long to get through. There was a woman there who had been a Mormon. Elder Gibbs had baptized her, but she had gone back. Went to Fly store. Ordered our mail to be sent there. Stopped at night with Mr. S. D. Oakley. Meals eaten 3, miles walked 5.

Jan. 18, 1896 - Weather cloudy. Saw a woman at Mr. Oakley's who was 92 years old and could get around very well. In the afternoon went to Fly P.O. but got no mail. Saw nice dried apples sold for one and one-half cents a pound and big geese for fifteen cents apiece. After which we went back to Bro. H. H. Harlow's where we sang a few songs and prepared for the meeting next day. Bro. Harling was one of the men who went with Bro. Roberts (B.H.) to get the elders that were killed on Cane Creek. Meals eaten 2, miles walked 8.

Jan 19, 1896 - Weather cloudy. Went to hold our meeting at 2 o'clock in a little school house with the stove pipe stuck through the window, but had a good crowd that paid strict attention. I spoke first and quoted a few passages on faith. We did well with the singing and after the meeting ever so many came up, shook hands, and wanted us to go home with them. Also gave away 10 or 12 tracts. At their request went home with Mr. Slater. At night several of his neighbors came to ask questions. Meals eaten 2, miles walked 2.

Jan. 20, 1896 - Weather cloudy. Went down to Bro. Harlow's - Had dinner then went to a one-armed Methodist preacher's, but he had very little to say and had some queer ideas. After which we started for Kinderhook, but missed the road and went 4 miles the other side. Didn't come to a house till we got to Hickman County, where we came to a large new house. Went there to find out where we were so we stopped with him until the next morning. His name was J. P. Moten. There had been some elders stop with him who sang "HAVE COURAGE MY BOY TO SAY NO". I got the words from him. He wished me to sing it but I did not. We sang some hymns. Meals eaten 3, miles walked 7.

Jan. 21, 1896. - Weather rainy. Took a 4-mile walk back to Kinderhook. Ate dinner with Mr. J.E. Truett after which we went to Fly P.O., but were disappointed - did not get any mail. Went up Leapers Creek and stopped all night with Mr. A.R. Harbison. He had 5 children and they were tuffs (toughs?) Most of them chewed tobacco and the woman was up most of the night spanking them and more the first thing in the morning. Meals eaten 3, miles walked 7.

Jan 22, 1896 - Tramped through the mud to Bethel where we wanted to get the school house to hold meeting, but we couldn't find the man in charge. Decided to go to Greenfield Bend with Bro. Harlow, so we started back to his place. Stopped at a house where there was a deaf and dumb man and woman and the largest man I ever saw. He was 6' 5" high and weighed 299 lbs. After that we tramped through the mud to Bro. Harlow's and he was gone. Sister Harlow fixed dinner for us about 4 o'clock after which we went and stopped all night with Mr. John Hill. Meals eaten 2, miles walked 7.

Jan 25, 1896 - Weather cloudy. Went to Fly P.O., took dinner with Mr. John Braidy. Received a letter from home with \$2.00 and 2 more letters from Uncle Pete and Will Carter. Went back and stopped over night with Mr. Jim Rail. His wife had belonged to our church, but when those elders were killed on Cane Creek, she got scared and joined the Methodists. Both she and her husband were ready to join our church but we thought best to wait awhile and let them repent and consider what they were doing. Meals eaten 3, miles walked 4.

Jan 27, 1896 - weather cloudy. Left Bro. Harlow's, went to a place called the Kelly settlement. Ate dinner with Mr. John Kelly who was very friendly. His wife was sickly and wanted us to come and preach to her sometime. Held a meeting in that settlement at Mr. R.B. Oakley's home. Had a very nice little turnout. I spoke first, read some from the Ready Reference. Stayed with Mr. Oakley that night who made us very welcome. Meals eaten 3, miles walked 3.

Jan 28, 1896 - Weather fine. Went to the Fly P.O. and got 8 letters apiece. I received one from Bro. Jesse J. Kelly wanting me to look up some of his folks, so we spent all afternoon visiting and looking up Kellys but found none that knew anything about him. Stopped with Mr. Tom Davis. Meals eaten 2, miles walked 8.

Jan 31, 1896 - Weather rained most all day and night. Tramped through the mud all day. Stopped outside of Theta and tried to wait in the rain under our umbrellas. Went to a house at night, asked if we could stay. The man said it was just as the madam said and she began - said they did not need anyone and she was not going to cook for us - said she took no one without money. The man started to speak and she told him to shut his mouth. There was another lady who lived in the other end of the house said she would take us in. It was now dark and raining to beat time. Meals eaten 1, miles walked 6.

Feb. 1, 1896 - weather rainy. Went to the axe-handle factory at Theta about 1 hour when the foreman invited us to go home and have dinner with him, after which went to the P.O. and then left Theta. The weather was so bad we gave up holding our meeting. Went down Snow Creek, called at a jewelry man by the name of Ragsdale who fixed my watch for nothing. We also stayed there overnight. Him and his sister played the organ and sang songs and spent a very pleasant evening. Meals eaten 3, miles walked 6.

Feb 4, 1896 - Weather fine. Canvassed the ridges between Leapers Creek and Snow Creek. Took dinner with Mr. N. Adkinson. Stopped in the woods awhile in the afternoon to straighten up our records. Got off in the woods and could not find any house till after dark. When we asked if we could stay overnight, he made a lot of excuses (he had no family) and sent us to a house where there were 9 children. The man did not want to take us in but the woman said her children might be out someday and she would hate them to be turned out that time of night. Meals eaten 3, miles walked 7.

Feb 23, 1896 - Weather rainy. Stopped at Mr. Colt's till after dinner. I was a little blue -

took all my letters out of my pocket and read them over. After dinner we started for Theta to hold our meeting - got there at half past two. Had a large turnout. After the meeting some ladies wanted us to sing another song which we did. After which the people skipped out and no one asked us to go with them. We started down the road with the heads down and were very blue. Went on over a mile and stopped with a Mr. Bingham who treated us very nice. Meals eaten 2, miles walked 4.

Feb. 28, 1896 - Weather rainy. Mr. Morrow took us around and showed us his hogs, then we went to Mr. J. R. Terrial's a good friend to us. Had dinner and stayed there till next morning. At night some neighbors came in and we spent the evening in singing songs and conversing on the Gospel. Meals eaten 3, miles walked 1.

May 16, 1896 - Weather cloudy. Finished canvassing Roberts Bend and in order to fill our appointment for the meeting did not have time to go very far so we spent most of the day reading. About 3 o'clock went to the P.O. where I received a letter from Ma and one from Will Carter. We went to a house near the school house and asked if we could stay there until meeting time. The man said we could so we went in thinking they would invite us to eat but they did not. While we were there two young men came in and said there were some of the people around there that objected to us holding our meeting and especially the school teacher who had said we were nothing but thieves going through the country trying to run away with the women and girls we could find. He said that if we preached there that night we would have to walk over his dead body. But there were ever so many men came and told us that they had come to see that we would not be bothered and that if the school teacher and his crowd came to interfere, they would lay down their lives in defense of our rights. But the teacher never came and we held our meeting and had a good crowd and they gave good attention. Elder H. spoke on the Restoration of the Gospel. I did not speak as it was 10 o'clock when he got through and I thought he had said enough for one night. After the meeting we had several invitations to go home and everybody treated us nice. Went home with Mr. Timmins. Meals eaten 1, miles walked 1.

Friday June 5. Canvassed until 10 o'clock when we went down Fountain Creek to take a bath. I went to jump across the branch and lit on a slick rock and slipped into the creek - so we took our bath and dried my clothes and went back to the P.O. where I received a letter from home. We could not get the school house for our meeting. Went to a house where a woman and two grown daughters were and asked if we could stay. She said she guessed we could as her husband never turned anyone away. We sat on the porch to wait for him. When we told him who we were and what we wanted, he raved and tore - said he would give us supper and then we would have to leave. We thanked him and took seats at the table and began talking with him. With the help of the Lord we made him ashamed of himself and we ate a hearty supper. We left in the dark and after going two miles we got to stay with Mr. W. J. Perry. Meals eaten 3, miles walked 8.

Monday June 15, 1896 - Spent the day at Mr. Millins reading and singing songs. About night we went to Bro. Loves and was intending to stay there overnight, but Mrs. Love sent for us to come and stay with them, so we went there and stayed overnight. She applied for baptism next day so we made arrangements to baptize her the next day at 2 o'clock. Meals eaten 3, miles walked 1.

Tuesday June 16 1896. Went to Bro. Charley Churches. Mr. Hite was there and we spent a few hours talking and singing songs. After dinner, we went to the river where I had the pleasure of going into the Duck River and baptizing Sister Mary Lou Love. After which we went to her house, sang songs and Elder James Larsen was mouthpiece in conferring the Holy Ghost. Stopped overnight with Bro. Joel Love. Meals eaten 3, miles walked 3.

July 16, 1896 - It rained and thundered most of the night and was raining as we arose from bed. Elder Savage had some writing to do and it was so muddy for walking we were not in a hurry to leave. At half past 10 we started and Mr. Pinkston insisted on us taking some apples with us and insisted we stay until after dinner, but we thought we had been there long enough. He went with us to the edge of his farm and when we bade him goodbye he broke down into tears. We went on trying to canvass. About 3 o'clock there came up the heaviest rain storm I ever was caught out in. It did rain, blow, thunder and lightning to beat time. We got up by a large oak tree, and with the help of our umbrellas, kept our back dry. I will never forget what a time we had getting to the next house, wading through water and walking fences. When we got to a house we were like two drowned rats. We found a man there 84 years old, a Mr. William Benton, who took us in and was very good to us. Made a fire for us to dry by. He did the best he could for us and after a pleasant evening we retired to bed about 8:30.

July 22, 1896. When we arose from our bed it was raining to beat time. We had breakfast and started to the Bryant P.O. through rain and mud. When we arrived there Elder Savage had 3 letters but there was none for me. On the way to our work at Parks Station it stopped raining and I discovered that the soles were coming off my shoes and if I did not get them fixed at once my shoes would be gone. I went to the storekeeper and told him I had no money and asked him if he would take stamps for a pair of shoe soles and a box of tacks. He said he would and loaned me a last and I went to work and half-soled my shoes and went on my way rejoicing. Canvassed until night and stopped with Mr. F. Gilliam, one of the elders of the Christian Church in Licksillet. He was just going to bed when we got there, but when Elder Savage told him we had no dinner, they got supper for us and treated us very nice. Meals eaten 2, miles walked 8.

These entries are from John's journal for 1896. Few entries for 1897 and none for 1898 were found. Either he kept no journal during that time or it has been lost. Other missionaries who served with him besides Elder Hickenlooper were Elder Ashcroft, Arthur M. Bunker, Albert L. Cullimore, H.E. Duffin, Nephi M. Savage, John E. Wilcox and others. John served on his mission for 34 months - just two months short of three years. For him, his mission was a

period of great spiritual and mental growth. He learned to be strong and self-reliant. He learned thrift and gained confidence in meeting and associating with people. By reading and studying, he gained a strong testimony of the Gospel.

John arrived home from his mission Aug. 20, 1898. While laboring in Putnam County he had become well acquainted with the Robert M. Davis family. They had a daughter named Dora Adella. About the time John left for home, Dora went to the home of an aunt and uncle who were living at Richfield, Utah at that time. On Oct. 5, 1898, according to previous plans, John met Dora at the Salt Lake temple and they were married there. John's brother, Hyrum, was married the same day to Miss Jessie Morton. The two couples were feted with a big wedding dinner and party upon their return to Colorado. John and Dora began house-keeping in a two-room cabin situated on the lot west of his father's home. It was one of the original cabins built when Richfield was first settled. The day after their first child was born, (a daughter named Clara Adella, 11 Aug. 1899) Dora's father, Robert M. Davis, arrived for a visit. He came to visit his daughter and first grandchild and to see if the climate would benefit his health as he suffered from tuberculosis. He was a carpenter and while here he built a new 4-room house for John and Dora. This was a white frame house located east of their first home. It had a good-sized parlor, two bedrooms, a large kitchen which also served as a dining room and a pantry. There was also a large closet which later became a bathroom. Robert Davis also built the front porch and other trimmings on John's father's place across the street. He was here about a year and after returning to Tennessee, passed away shortly thereafter. As John and Dora's family increased, they had an addition built which consisted of three rooms. This addition was built by Roy Davis, Dora's brother, who had moved from Tennessee to Colorado. All of their children were born in Richfield, namely: Clara Adella 11 Aug. 1899, Grace 25 Sept. 1901, John Howard 22 Oct. 1902, Ruth Agnes 16 Sept. 1905, Troy Ellis 1 Apr. 1907, Edwin Earl 26 Sept. 1908, Ren Davis 1 June 1910 (died in infancy), Gladys 14 Dec. 1913 and Louise 14 Oct. 1915.

Following his marriage, John continued in the farming and livestock business with his father and brothers. Over the years his father had acquired considerable land - piece by piece. Before 1910, John's father divided up most of his land between his children. John's portion was the so-called Peterson place north of Richfield and a piece of land just east of La Jara. In 1917 John purchased the Newcomb ranch north of La Jara from Mrs. Catherine Newcomb and moved his family to the farmstead on that ranch. Here, the family enjoyed a typical farm life. There were chickens, turkeys, hogs, milk cows which provided milk, cream and butter in addition to the herd of range cattle. Once John also raised a few geese. He always butchered hogs and cattle for meat and lard for domestic use. Last but not least he enjoyed raising and caring for a large vegetable garden.

After John returned from his mission, he began to develop the qualities of leadership which were in evidence throughout his life. He was made Ward Clerk and president of the Young Men's Improvement Ass'n. He was next made superintendent of the Sunday School, and was given the job of chairman of the Ward Building Committee. The latter job involved the

building of the brick church in Richfield. John's journal mentioned that the church was built for \$2,464.25 and was dedicated Dec. 27, 1903, by Stake President Albert R. Smith. On July 15, 1905 an entry in his journal stated "Went to conference at Manassa, was put in Bishop of Richfield Ward." He was just 30 years old when he was made bishop. His counselors were Erastus Beck and Henry W. Valentine. Following his release as bishop on Oct. 29, 1908 he became a member of the Stake High Council. On May 25, 1919 he was sustained as the second counselor to William O Crowther in the presidency of the San Luis stake. Samuel Jackson was the first counselor. He was released from that calling on Dec. 6, 1924. Later he was one of the presidents of the stake high priests quorum and again a member of the High Council. He states in his memoirs, "I do not remember for sure if I was a member of the High Council before or after I was president of the High Priests Quorum, but I was a member of the High Council for a number of years both before and after being in the stake presidency. Of all of his church positions John often said that the job in the stake presidency was the most difficult and trying of any job. People were prone to come to the stake presidency to settle all of their problems large and small. John felt that many of these were very petty and unimportant, and that many times people displayed feelings of jealousy and contention which did not exemplify the teachings of the Savior.

It was not only in the Church that John exhibited leadership ability. He was very active in the affairs of the La Jara community. In the newspaper THE LA JARA CHRONICLE under the date of Feb 16, 1906, these headlines were printed: MEN WHO DO THINGS MET AT LA JARA SATURDAY. Under that was the statement "The town hall was crowded and every man present displayed marked interest in all projects prepared for advancement." In the ensuing article mention was made of nine people who addressed the meeting. One of those was John W. Shawcroft. Shortly after 1900 a small branch bank was operated in La Jara by Robert and John Wallace of Monte Vista. A group of citizens headed by B. L. Van Vechten decided to start a bank and John was invited to take stock in that bank. The stock was issued Aug 6, 1906 and the bank opened immediately thereafter. John as elected a director of this bank which was called THE LA JARA STATE BANK. The capital stock was \$30,000.00 for a total of 300 shares. The bank office was located on main street on the corner where the present bank now stands. Other directors of the bank were R. J. Kavalec, Cashier, Luther A. Norland, S.E. Newcomb, L.D. Eskridge, Christen Jensen, Samuel Jackson, and Peter Peterson. In 1910 another bank was established in La Jara headed by W.A. Braiden, J.A. McDaniel, J. S. Fletcher, J. Luis Rivera and others. It was THE FIRST NATIONAL BANK. For about seven years these two banks were operated in La Jara when it became apparent that the town was not large enough to support two banks. The First National Bank purchased the La Jara State Bank and moved its office to the corner lots where the La Jara State Bank was located. In the reorganization after the merger, John was elected a director of the First National Bank on May 29, 1917. He served as a director until Sept 21, 1936 when he was made president after W. A. Braiden and others disposed of their stock. He served as president until Jan. 11, 1955 when he was made chairman of the board and O. A. Garris was made president. Mr. Garris passed away in 1957 and John was again elected president, serving in that capacity from Dec. 4, 1957 to Jan 12, 1960. He retired in

1960 when his health began to fail. The following figures reflect the growth made by the bank during the years John was associated with it.

In 1933 when President Roosevelt closed all of the banks, many banks had to remain closed for some time to correct some problems, but the First National Bank of La Jara reopened within a

week.

Probably because he had such a poor education himself, John showed an early interest in the school, especially after his own children began school. There were three schools in the area, La Jara, Newcomb and Richfield. A movement had begun to consolidate these three schools and John became very active in support of the consolidation. Each district met and formally approved the consolidation and finally, a joint meeting of all three districts was held in the opera house to elect officers. With about 250 voters present John was elected president of the new school district with J. P. McKelvey as treasurer and W.S. Mount as secretary. On March 15, 1915 a bond election was held to raise money to build and equip the new school. It was passed by a large majority and the new board started immediately to select the site and to build a new building. It was a large three-story brick building of which the community was very proud. It was no small job to equip the building, hire teachers, and buy school buses to transport the out-of-town children to the new school. This was the second consolidated school established in the state of Colorado and the first public high school (tax-supported) in Conejos County. John recalled in his memoirs: "For 13 years I was a member of the school board." John remained interested in the schools all of his life and never failed to attend the commencement programs each year when able.

It was about 1910 when John became interested in the political activities of Conejos County. He recalled:

"I think it was about 1912 when my friends and leaders of the Republican party persuaded me to run for county commissioner. At that time politics in Conejos County were pretty much controlled by a group called "The Old Gang" My opponent was Robert M. Haynie and I was defeated by about 200 votes. In the fall of 1924 I ran and was elected to the Colorado House of Representatives. I did not run for office in 1926 but in 1928 I was elected State Senator after a hard contest. I had not wanted to run in this contest as my opponent was my good friend, Frank. W. Russell, a fellow-townsmen and director of the bank. I ran again in 1932, which was the year of the big Democratic landslide when Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected President of the United States. My opponent, Fred T. Christensen, was elected although I received a majority in my home county. During the next four years the senatorial districts were changed and Conejos County was put into a district with Rio Grande, Saguache and Mineral counties. In 1936 we did not elect a senator and A.E. Headlee was our senator for two years by arrangements made when the district was changed. In 1938 I was elected senator from the newly formed district, my opponent being Dr. H. C. Myers of Antonito. In 1942 I was elected without opposition. It was during this term that I was elected President Pro Tem of the Senate. It was my privilege (arranged by my good friends) to serve as Governor of the State of Colorado for one day while the Governor, John C. Vivian, and the Lieutenant Governor, Homer Pearson, were out of the state. In 1946 I was again unopposed in the election, and during this time (for the first two years) I was chosen majority floor leader of the senate. I refused to be a candidate in 1950 and thus concluded my work as a legislator having served two years in the House of Representatives

and sixteen years in the Senate. "I can truthfully say that I never sought any political office which I held, but was persuaded to do so by my friends and political associates." During most of John's terms in the State Legislature, he was a member of the finance committee, and he worked very hard for funds for the struggling Adams State College (first known as Adams State Normal School and later as Adams State Teachers College). He also worked hard for better education throughout the state. In 1959 he was presented with an Outstanding Citizen Award from Adams State College.

Two of the highlights of John's political career was his attendance at two National Conventions where the Republican candidate for president of the United States was chosen. He was an alternate delegate to the convention at Philadelphia where Wendell Wilkie was chosen to run against Franklin D. Roosevelt. He also attended the convention in Chicago as a delegate where Thomas E. Dewey was selected to run against Harry Truman. Although both candidates were later defeated, John enjoyed very much the procedure by which they were chosen and also the colorful and noisy activities during the conventions. Dora attended the Philadelphia convention with him and while there they traveled to Washington, D.C. and New York City on very enjoyable sight-seeing trips. During World War II, John was appointed to the Appeals board of the Selective Service. He traveled regularly to Denver each month or oftener to decide on appeals made by young men wanting to be excused from military duty. He received a Medal and Citation for his work on this board.

John and Dora, along with Gladys and Louise, moved from the ranch to La Jara in 1937. Dora became ill late in 1942. When they went to Denver for the legislative session, she went to a doctor who found that she had inoperable cancer. Dora remained in Mercy Hospital for two months and passed away March 4, 1943. Louise had gone to Denver to stay during this time and she and John visited Dora daily (and sometimes more often). Other family members traveled to Denver and visited her during those last two months. This was a very difficult time for John as he had to return to his legislative duties after the funeral. In the years he had been in the legislature, Dora had enjoyed going to Denver. At first they stayed at the Colorado Hotel, but for later sessions they stayed at the Shirley Savoy Hotel. Dora enjoyed life at the hotels where she had a rest from cooking and housekeeping. During the years they were in Denver, John was the only LDS member in the legislature. At first the only L.D.S. church was a branch of the Western States Mission located at 7th and Pearl Streets, which they attended whenever possible. It was not until 1940 that the first stake was organized there. Now there are many stakes and also a temple. For four years after Dora's death, John lived at home with Louise and Gladys and on July 9, 1947 he married twice-widowed Mrs. Estella Nielson Jensen in Denver. She had been living in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

The cattle business was of lifelong interest to John. He worked hard at improving his cattle herd and received a number of prizes at the National Western Stock Show at Denver over the years. He attended every stock show held there from the time it first began in 1907 until poor health would not permit. He served on the Livestock Advisory Board, was a member of

the Colorado Cattlemen's Association, the San Luis Valley Cattlemen's Association and the American Cattle Growers Association. In 1957 he received the Senior Partner Award from the Colorado Cattlemen's Association for many years service to the cattle raising industry. Hand in hand with his love for the cattle raising industry was his love for the land and the products it produced. Over the years he acquired other parcels of land in addition to the Peterson place and the Newcomb ranch. These included the 160-acre Bosworth place north of the Newcomb ranch, 480 acres in the Nortonville area which had been a part of the early-day Salvation Ranch, and half of the so-called School Section which adjoined part of his land on the north. It was through his efforts that the Shawcrofts obtained a Homestead Entry on a section of land in the mountains. He knew every ravine, spring, wooded slope and stream on the land where the Cow Camp is in the mountains. He had ridden horseback and built fence over all of that range. He also had an interest in the grazing company called the Bancos Cattle Co. And owned 1000 acres of land in the Brazos Cattle Co. In New Mexico. There was nothing more beautiful to John than a field of ripening grain or a green meadow with cattle grazing or the mountains - all God's handiwork and creation given to man as stewards to preserve and improve. After John transferred his property to his children, he continued to advise and help them all he could. By doing this he maintained an interest in farming and livestock up to the time of his death.

“All work and no play” was not John's philosophy. From early childhood John enjoyed the programs and socials provided by the church and the community. He loved music and although he disparaged his own musical ability, he enjoyed the performances of others. He had sung a lot on his mission and in later years he and Nathan would entertain at family gatherings - keeping alive the old songs of a bygone day. Troy and Howard had a talent for singing and John enjoyed hearing them sing at funerals and church meetings. He bought a piano for his family and also a phonograph when the phonographs were first put on the market. He liked the musical programs on the radio and TV. His favorites were the Tabernacle Choir and the Lawrence Welk Show. He also liked dramatic presentations - plays, literary programs, pageants and motion pictures. He enjoyed the school plays and programs. Edwin and Troy both had a talent for acting and he enjoyed seeing them perform. In early days traveling theatrical groups often came to La Jara so John and his family were always on hand to enjoy them. One year the community subscribed to a Chautauqua Series. John and his family joined this series and greatly enjoyed the variety and excellence of the plays, musical programs, lectures, etc. which were presented. When John and Dora were in Denver, they both enjoyed the excellent stage plays and musical programs available there. They liked motion pictures and had seen them progress from very crude silent beginnings to sound and finally to color. John liked sports - baseball being his favorite. He played baseball in his younger days and enjoyed these games all of his life. He was fond of fishing, rodeos, horse-racing, and horse-shoe pitching. He liked to travel and had been to Alaska, California, New York, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C. and Florida. He had planned a trip to Hawaii when he became ill. One of his hobbies was raising flowers and he always liked to have flowers blooming in his yard.

The family was very important to John. Once in his missionary journal in between other

entries, he wrote in large letters GOD BLESS MY HOME AND KINDRED. When he was feeling homesick he would mention things that he missed at home such as good bread and milk for supper, the celebrations at Richfield on the 4th and 24th of July. He thought a great deal of his parents and, being the eldest child, was very close to them. He missed his father when he passed away in 1922. Nathan was closest to him of his six brothers. Perhaps this was because they were closer in age and experience. The one thing that John and Nathan missed most when they moved away from Richfield was the close association with family and friends. John's mother, Maria, died in 1930 after a fifteen-day illness of pneumonia. He visited her every day during her illness and often stayed most of the night with her. John's brother, Hyrum died in an accident later that same year. After a long and painful battle with cancer, Raldy (Maralda) passed away in 1936. John grieved at her long suffering. Pearl, handicapped from birth, died in 1945, and Nathan passed away in 1958. All of John's other brothers and sisters survived him. He particularly lamented the condition of his sister, Sarah, who through much of her married life had suffered cruel and abusive treatment from her husband, whom she finally divorced. John thought a great deal of his children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He was always concerned for their happiness and well-being. His daughter, Clara, underwent surgery in Denver in 1962. She never recovered from the operation and passed away in Denver on Oct. 20, 1962. John was ill at that time, and was always very sad that he was not able to go to Denver and be with her during those last days. He was very grateful to his children when he became ill for how they took care of him and visited him often during his long illness.

It was the late summer of 1959 when John became ill. Local doctors could not diagnose his illness, so he traveled to Albuquerque for medical consultation. He was found to be suffering from shingles - a disease or infection of the nerve endings. He suffered excruciating pain and was taken to Denver to see if doctors there could help him. The verdict was the same everywhere - in an elderly person the nerve endings just would not heal. When the pain was very severe, blisters would break out on the back and one side of his neck, even up in his ear. He could only lie down on one side. He was hospitalized for a time, but he was happier at home. It became increasingly difficult for Stella to take care of him, so he was moved to the home of Gladys and Louise. A hospital bed was installed there and Agnes, a registered nurse, Grace, who had had a great deal of nursing experience caring for her invalid husband, and Louise cared for him. Gladys was working at the bank at that time and could not help much. He was forced to resign his position as president of the bank - a job he had always enjoyed very much. He became very depressed as time went on and said he would rather have a disease that would kill rather than the one he had where the pain just went on and on. He missed being around people and Louise would take him downtown when he felt like it and he would watch the people. Sometimes, when he was feeling especially bad, he would have Louise read to him from the Book of Job in the Bible. He took comfort in reading of Job's faith while undergoing similar afflictions. His eyes weakened so that he was unable to read or to watch TV very much. He did sit up and watch the account of the assassination of president John F. Kennedy and was very interested in that - said it was watching history in the making. He never was completely bedfast - arose and dressed every day - and could do many things for himself and for this, he

was truly grateful. On Thanksgiving day, 1964, Louise prepared a delicious turkey dinner with all the trimmings. He sat up at the table and ate heartily. In the late afternoon, Sarah and Murl Holman came by for a little while and he seemed to be feeling all right at that time. During the night he became ill and Agnes was called for help. She called the doctor, but he was unable to do anything for him as he had suffered a heart attack. He passed away in the early morning on Nov. 30, 1964, just thirteen days short of his ninetieth birthday. During his long illness, he had greatly enjoyed the visits of his relatives and friends. He always said that the thing he missed most during his illness was being able to attend Sunday School and go to the Gospel Doctrine class.

For a long time, John had remarked that he wanted to die at home in La Jara. He was very fond of his home town, for he had seen every building erected in the town except those built while he was on his mission. It could be said that he and the town of La Jara had grown up together. He always said that La Jara was “the best place on earth”. During the long days of his illness when time passed slowly and heavily, his thoughts were flooded with memories of times long gone. When he was able, he wrote or dictated many of the quotes found in this history. Other material was taken from previous writings, from taped interviews and from journals which he kept over the years. He could remember very well events that happened long ago, but had trouble remembering what happened the previous day. One unknown writer has likened old age to a high mountain, the pinnacle of which is reached by a long hard climb over thorny paths, rocky crags, and perilous heights. But upon reaching the top, below can be seen a vast panorama of scenes, events and accomplishments of a lifetime - a wonderful view. Cicero, the great Roman statesman, expressed this thought best when he said, “The life given us by nature is short, but the memory of a well-spent life is eternal”.

Compiled January 1988
by Gladys Shawcroft

ADDENDUM

It is impossible to relate all of the interesting day-to-day happenings of John’s life in this history. Some, which were overlooked when the history was written, are considered to be of sufficient interest to include in this addition to the original history. Other incidents may be added to these as they are recalled. These events are not listed in chronological order.

When John was 14 years old, he was present at the last legal hanging that took place in Conejos County. Abran Ortiz was hanged for the murder of a man by the name of La Duc. La Duc was on his way from Summitville to La Jara when he met up with Abran Ortiz who invited La Duc to spend the night in his cabin. La Duc’s body was found in the cabin, and Ortiz was found wearing La Duc’s fine tailored wool suit and gold watch. The case received a great deal

of publicity and many from Richfield attended the execution on July 16, 1889. The only comment that John ever made about it was that Ortiz' neck was stretched a long way. What makes this event of interest is that some years later, the son of Abran Ortiz, Felix Ortiz, was hired by the Shawcrofts as the range rider during the summer months for their range in the mountains. Felix (always called Felis by the family) worked at this job for thirty-five years or more. He was the best help the Shawcrofts ever had as he would go ahead with the work without being told - fixing fence, scattering salt, moving the cattle as needed and reporting any sick animals or troubles of any kind. Felis had his own little farm near Jacob's hill so it was convenient for him to take care of his own place too. He was always dependable, capable and a hard worker. He always kept the cow camp and the cabin neat and clean. When he retired and moved to La Jara, he remained a warm personal friend of John's children. He had three daughters, Perfecta (Mrs. John Cordova) who lives near Howard and Agnes, Anna (Mrs. Walter Schimpf) who operated Ann's Café in La Jara for a number of years before ill health forced her retirement, and Mrs. Joe Arellano (given name has been forgotten).

While John was serving in the San Luis Stake Presidency, it was his responsibility to meet the train at La Jara on Saturday morning and welcome the visitor or visitors who came from Utah to attend stake conference at Manassa. He gave them breakfast at his home and escorted them to Manassa where they always stayed on Saturday night with the stake president, W.O. Crowther. During this time, John entertained a number of general authorities in his home for breakfast. The family is unable to remember all of them, but does remember David O. McKay, Joseph Fielding Smith, Antoine R. Ivins, and Melvin J. Ballard. Apostle Ballard was a special favorite of John and his family. One time when he came he sat at the piano and played and sang several hymns. He had a fine voice and many who remember his visits recall how his voice would be heard above the congregation. Gladys recalls that he sang the hymn, OH, HOW LOVELY WAS THE MORNING among others on that Saturday morning. One time he returned home with John and spent Saturday night at his home. After supper, he gathered with the family by the fireplace and spent the entire evening relating his many and varied missionary experiences. John's family has never forgotten this very interesting and inspirational experience. In 1925, Elder Ballard was sent by the Church Presidency to South America where he spent eight months dedicating and opening up that continent for missionary work. The Church has made remarkable growth there in the sixty-two years since that journey. John's grandson, Lynn Shawcroft, is serving at this time as president of the Guayaquil, Ecuador Mission. It is not known if this was one of the countries that Elder Ballard visited on that historic journey.

One time John had a frightening experience in the mountains. It was a time when the cattle were to be brought down from the mountains in the fall. The drivers, Lewis Shawcroft, Gerald Shawcroft, Art Guymon and others, had gone by horseback up to the cow camp in preparation to round up the cattle and drive them home. John followed them to the cow camp in a wagon which contained bedding and grub boxes, for they expected to take several days for the job. He traveled by a longer route up through Dry Canyon. It was growing dark when he got to

the gate (of the lease) when a blinding snow storm came up. He attempted to go on but it was snowing so hard he could not see the road. He kept on going, but discovered that he was going over tracks that he had already gone over. He was lost. In the meantime, the riders at the camp became worried when John did not appear. They built a big fire by the camp thinking he might see it and be guided by it. He decided to shout thinking the men might hear him. They finally heard him, and got the horses and began to hunt for him. It was difficult to know just where he was as sometimes the shouts would sound from different places and they could not see anything. They found him and helped him get to camp. This fall storm was so bad that it took several days to gather the cattle and head home. All of the riders were overcome by “snow blindness” on this job.

John experienced another accident in the mountains that could have been disastrous. He and Howard had gone by wagon to the cow camp. When they got to the twin gates, a very bad electrical storm came up. They continued on to the next gate, but Howard was so frightened that he covered up his head with a quilt so that he could not see the lightning. John got out to open the gate and started back to the wagon when a very close flash of lightning spooked the horses and they took off. Howard said that it was a miracle how his father ran and caught those horses. Another time, John had a narrow escape from serious injury when he and Howard had gone to the mountains to repair fences. Howard was about twelve years old. They had reached the north side when they came to a steep place where they could not take the wagon. They decided to ride the horses up that hill over a trail that was very steep and rocky. John’s horse stumbled on a rock and fell, rolling over John and off the other side. Howard thought his father was injured for sure, but John stood up, shaking like a leaf, and the only evidence that he was hurt was that he kept rubbing his forehead. Working with the cattle in the mountains could be very dangerous, and John always thought it wise for a person not to be alone to work on the range.