

Almo -- My Town

Written by Mary Ellen Rasmussen -- A resident of Almo for 21 years, and a resident of Cassia County for 54 years. Best of all, a happy homemaker, wife, mother, and grandmother.

The town of Almo, in southeastern Cassia County, is one of the oldest communities in the area. The loftiest peak in the county, 10,500 foot Mt. Independence or Independence Peak as it is commonly called, towers above it.

“Old timers recall there was considerable argument about the name for the young settlement. Some wanted to name it Durfeeville, but finally Myron Durfee and Thomas O. King derived the name from the Spanish word ‘Alamo’ meaning Great Battle, and the people agreed to accept it. Tom King had first seen the valley in 1855 when, as a boy of fifteen, he and other scouts from Salt Lake City came through the area to the City of Rocks searching for renegade Indians who had stolen horses from the Mormon settlers in Utah.

“Almo is a quiet place, headquarters for an agricultural and ranching area. Old timers say that hundreds of tons of hay were cut and put in stacks in the valley for the stagecoach horses.

(From Etta Taylor s Historical highlights of Almo)

I was born in the Almo Valley on the 27th of October 1923 and I have never regretted that my roots were planted in that part of God’s vineyard. I was raised on a ranch. I was taught the value of work and the value of play by a kind and loving Dad and Mother. I learned to ride a horse early in life and even now chuckle at the memory of my two brothers and me astride old “Nubbins”. Unlike most children, even though I was raised on a ranch, I have never seen an animal born; and when the cattle were corralled for branding, I was sent to the house. My dad would say, “This is no place for a lady.” I have always been grateful for that protection.

The Almo School was built in 1916. It consisted of four rooms and a path (outdoor plumbing). Only three of the rooms were used when I started school. The first and second grades were in one room, the third, fourth, and fifth grades in another, and the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades in the third. There were three teachers, two women and one man. They meted out the discipline as needed and I never recall a single dropout. My brother said on his first day of school he and his cousin couldn’t stop laughing at something that happened and the teacher took them in the vacant room and paddled them both with a yard stick.

The Almo school today has kindergarten through the sixth grade. There are three teachers and 27 students.

Since our ranch was four miles from Almo, we had to have transportation to school. We had a number of drivers, my dad and mother being two of them. My dad took the back seat out of our Model A car and fit benches in the back, on all three sides, for the children to sit on. In the winter, if the snow was too deep, my mother drove a sleigh, pulled by a team of horses, and picked up school children along the way. We would run behind the sleigh, fall in the snow, get up and run some more before we would fall, giggling into the back of the sleigh.

The school with its aura of chalk, books, and learning, is just a hop, skip and a jump from the Almo Store. The store is the oldest mercantile business in Cassia County, and has always been in operation since it opened its doors in 1894. A centennial celebration is planned for this

year. The store's second floor was often used for dancing. In 1912 my dad and mother's wedding dance was held there. It was a store filled with many things. I remember shoes, yard goods, bright shining ribbons, and buttons of all colors and size. A nickel bought a box of cookies. I have to this day never found a brick of cheese that was as tasty as the cheese sold from the store's showcase. It is still a cozy, homey, country store that we always visit when we are in the Almo Valley.

The Mormon church house was the meeting place for all social gatherings. A great display of talent was paraded across the stage in the recreational hall. Three act plays were presented, speeches were given, poems and readings were recited, and the melodic pitches of different voices brought goose bumps to many a listener.

The dances were wonderful. The orchestras were a gathering of local talent and they were good. We danced the first and last dance with our date and in between we danced with many. Sometimes we would have children's dances in the afternoons with a box lunch. The girls decorated fancy boxes and filled them with goodies. The boys bid on the boxes and the girl shared her lunch with the boy who made the bid. The older women taught the young children different dances. One of my favorites was "Don't you see my, don't you see my, don't you see my new shoes?"

The church house was built in 1901. A recreational hall, a stage, and classrooms were added in 1916. After years of service, this proud old structure was completely demolished in 1983, a few months after the September 1982 dedication of a new church house located just to the east. Almo Park now graces the spot where the old church stood.

The Fourth of July was a special time. A cannon was fired in the early morning hours and could be heard throughout the valley. A patriotic program was presented in the recreational hall of the church. Outside of the church, hamburgers, hot dogs, and pop were sold. Horse races and foot races were run. A baseball game in the afternoon with a team from one of the surrounding towns and a big dance at night completed the festivities.

My grandmother had a swimming pool. It was called "Durfee Hot Springs" and oh, what fun every one had in it! People would come from miles around for a swim. The pool was across the road from her house and down in a pasture. It was a natural warm spring, that continually bubbled up, filling the swimming area, and running out through a hole at the pool's end. The bottom of the pool was of smooth rock and the sides were of cement. A board fence surrounded the pool with dressing rooms at each end. Grandma even had suits for rent. Once a week the pool would be closed for a day and Grandma would pull the plug and let all the water drain out. She would then take her broom and sweep the bottom and the sides of the pool. The plug would be replaced, the pool would fill, and Grandma was ready for business again. She kept the pool locked but she was always willing to let people in when they came for a swim. Grandma would stay at the pool until every one had departed. She was our life guard.

The Indians would come every fall for pine nuts. Sometimes they camped above our home. My dad took me up to their camp one night. They were all sitting around a campfire eating pork and beans out of a can with their hands. They passed the can of beans from one to another. I remember how frightened I was.

One morning an Indian squaw opened the door and walked into our home. My mother was cooking breakfast. The squaw demanded several items of food, which my mother gave her, and then the squaw turned and vanished through the door from which she had come.

In 1927, when I was four years old, my mother and dad moved into their new home. It was beautiful. It still stands on the ranch today. We had a Delco plant which provided electricity

for the new home and later on a windmill was installed. If both of these quit working, we reverted back to a kerosene lamp until the Delco system was repaired. Of course the windmill wasn't any good unless the wind blew. Electricity was brought into the valley in November of 1940.

There were some phones in Almo as early as 1925. They were operated from a switchboard in Albion. Our ring was two long ones and two short ones. Everyone on the line was able to listen in on the conversation and everybody usually did. Dial phones were installed in the valley in 1954.

On the evening of June 21, 1991, I sat in the Almo Park as the sun slowly disappeared into the west. Mt. Independence loomed to the north, bringing a memory of me and my girlfriends riding our horses over its rugged peak and descending to the lakes below. It also brought forth a memory of that same peak covered with snow, and a sleigh with eight tiny reindeer gliding over the top into my valley.

My eyes dropped to the hill that formed a half circle back of my granddad and grandmother's home. The hill obscured the Castle Rocks, but it was always a comforting sight and a protection from the elements for my grandparent's home. I remembered the pretty flowers that grew on that hill--Indian paint brushes, yellow buttercups, and a variety of purple, blue and white daisies that were integrated among the sage brush. I used to help gather those flowers to help decorate the graves at the cemetery on Memorial Day.

To the south edge of this semi-circled hill loomed the Indian Grove. From this panoramic view Chief Pocatello and his warriors watched as the wagon train of emigrants left Almo Creek and moved westward over the valley floor.

The terrain of mountains rose and fell as they extended southward concealing the beauty of the City of Rocks. To the direct south was Yost, Utah, a little community nestled at the base of this mountainous range.

To the east were the East Mountains. By faith I always knew the moon would ascend over their tops and flood my peaceful valley with light. They were also the hiding place for the sun until it peeked its brilliant head over the rim and began its ascent into the heavens to give me light by day. The East Mountains also gave us timber. My dad always went there every fall to cut wood for our winter warmth. They were also the housing headquarters for mustangs, wild horses with flaring nostrils, wild eyes, and floating tails. How frightened they were and so was I as I watched astride a pole fence as these mustangs were run in and corralled. I asked my brother if there were any more mustangs out on the East Mountains. His reply was, "Hell no, I roped the last one." He and a friend were out riding and ran into this mustang. They chased it all over the mountain. My brother finally said to his friend, "I'll go to the bottom of this draw. You chase the horse down to me and I will rope it." My brother rode to the bottom of the draw and wound the end of his lariat around the horn on his saddle. With lariat coiled, he waited. All at once, with thundering hooves, the mustang was upon him. He threw the lariat and it settled around the mustang's neck. When the horse came to the end of the lariat, it broke the horn right off my brother's saddle and away it ran. However, they finally roped the horse. My brother said it was a three-year-old. I finally mustered up the courage to ask, "How could you tell?" He answered, "By the number of teeth it had." My courage was stronger this time so I said, "How could you tell it was a mustang?" His reply was, "It didn't have a brand on." I can tell my city life has made me forget a little of my ranch life and I was grateful for his patience.

I shall always have happy memories of Almo, a town and valley that I will always call home. My horse was my bicycle, the wide-open spaces my highway.

