

Orson Hall

1854 - 1929

Adapted by Faye West
from a document entitled
Orson Hall, Eliza Johanna, Anna Maria
written about 1979
by Rae Hall Eller, Orson's granddaughter

Orson Hall was the youngest son of Joshua Challis and Sally Ann Bybee Hall. Joshua was a polygamist who had four wives, so in addition to his six full brothers and two sisters, Orson had three half brothers and two half sisters. Joshua and Sally Ann left a comfortable home and prosperous business in Iowa to settle with the Latter Day Saints in Utah.

Orson was born 23 March 1854 in Weber County and lived there until after he was married. His father, Joshua, went to Southern Utah to help colonize there, apparently one or more of his wives accompanied him but Sally Ann went to Uintah County with her sons, died in Dry Fork and is buried in the little cemetery there. Orson used to tell about his mother sitting by the fireplace in the evenings, sewing and smoking on a corn cob pipe (a habit she acquired in Kentucky and never gave up). When her pipe went out it was always his job to light it from an ember from the fire.

Orson was a complex person; stories are told of his stubbornness, his generosity, honesty, shrewdness, austerity, love of animals. There are only about twenty-eight of his descendants who remember him and it's with their help that this account of his life is written. (In 1979)

On January 26, 1877 Orson married Eliza Johanna Tracy, the only daughter of Eli and Eliza Ann Sprague Tracy. Eli and Eliza Ann had been called by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints to serve a mission to the Indians in Wyoming. They were very anxious to serve and enthusiastic about this opportunity to teach and help the Indians at Fort Supply. Eliza was their first child and born at the Fort on 3 February 1857. As recorded in Eli's autobiography, "Like most mothers and fathers we thought she was the only child". He also recorded later, "She was always a dutiful child and grew to womanhood beloved by all and at the age of 21 years was married to Orson Hall".

Eliza was a remarkable woman, quiet and soft spoken, quite dominated by her husband. However, on occasions when she was convinced that his demands were not justified, she countermanded his authority and acted in the best interest of the family. Her parents were displeased when she married Orson Hall and their relationship was not as close after her marriage.

Six children were born to Orson and Eliza in Huntsville, the eldest, Orson Eli on 15 Sept 1877, then a girl who died at birth, David Moses on 14 Nov 1881, Joseph Lee on 31 Mar 1884, Mary Elizabeth on 7 May 1886, and Absolem Moroni on 18 Feb 1888.

Orson decided to leave Huntsville about 1889 "to escape Petticoat Government" indicating Eliza's mother interfered too much. They decided to move to Uintah County where his brothers and mother had settled. It was quite a journey for the young family as it was quite a distance from Huntsville and the territory was desolate and even dangerous. When they arrived in Dry Fork, Orson's brother Chell helped them get settled.

On January 31, 1890, Charles was born. He died at age two from a tragic accident: his mother was washing clothes and he fell into the scalding hot wash water. She was broken hearted about the accident and always blamed herself for his death. Three weeks after Charles' death their sixth son, Tracy was born but lived only one week dying on 23 Jan 1892.

When the oldest son Ott was about 14 or 15 he had a hunting accident and was blinded. Eliza wanted to get medical help but Orson was stubborn and didn't think anything or anyone could make him see again. There were good doctors at Fort Duschene and although it was many miles away and barren country, she made a bed for Ott in the back of an old democrat and made the journey herself. This was surely a brave undertaking for the frail little woman, but the love she had for her children dispelled any fear she may have had. She left Ott in capable hands and returned alone to her family in Dry Fork. Thanks to her determination and faith, the sight in Ott's right eye was restored. The doctors took good care of him and Ott paid them by working long hours at the Fort, peeling potatoes, polishing harness, driving the Colonel in his buggy.

Sally Favorett was born 11 Nov 1894 and they all enjoyed this baby girl, as they did another one, Leona May, born 25 Nov 1897.

In the summer of 1901, Ott decided to go north seeking his fortune. He intended to look for land in Montana but went on to Canada. Before he left home his mother lovingly hugged him tight and wept saying she knew she would never see him again. On the 14th of November 1901, Eliza Johanna died in childbirth. The baby, a daughter, also died. For three days and nights she suffered, no doctors were available and finally she prayed for death and was released. She had endured much; many heartaches and a life of hardship. The obituary in the *Vernal Express* tells of her sweet nature and good life.

Eliza A Hall, wife of Orson Hall, of Dry Fork, suddenly died Thursday morning at 6 a.m. of childbirth. The sad news came as a shock to scores of friends and acquaintances who always held the highest regard for the deceased for her loving disposition and estimable character and worth as a woman.

She was raised at Huntsville, Utah and was the only daughter of Eli and Eliza Ann Tracy, who are both living. At the time of death the deceased was forty-five years of age, having lived in Dry Fork thirteen years. Seven children and a husband are left to mourn her loss. She was the president of the Relief Society which office she has held for a long time with credit and the entire confidence of all.

Two of her sons who are working in Colorado have been sent for and are expected to arrive tonight.

The funeral will be held at Dry Fork tomorrow at 11 o'clock.

Eliza Hall is buried in the Dry Fork cemetery with her baby daughter and the two little sons who predeceased her.

When Ott learned of his mother's death he returned to Dry Fork. He was impressed with Southern Alberta and the homesteading opportunities offered there. He convinced his father and family to move to Canada. It wasn't easy to leave their home, friends and family but they sold their land and belongings and prepared for the trip. Dave, the second son, had married Elsie Fisher and they also decided to go. Also Jeff Hall, a nephew; a neighbour David Bingham and his son David; William Labrun; Charles Searle and his son Roy. They left Dry Fork the latter part of March 1902 but before

leaving their family and friends held a farewell party. An article in the *Vernal Express* expresses the esteem in which the family was held.

The citizens of Dry Fork gathered for a farewell party last Friday in honour of Orson Hall and family who left for Canada to make their home. The following was read during the evening:

Dry Fork Utah, March 14, 1902. To Brother Orson Hall and family:

We have gathered here this evening as brethren, sisters and friends to bid you a last farewell before you depart from among those with whom you have lived so many years. We testify to our friendship and respect for you as a brother and our fellow citizen.

In all the years while you have been a member of our little community, we have been intimately acquainted with you. We have rejoiced with you when the sunshine of prosperity and happiness were your lot and we have wept with you when the dark clouds of sorrow cast a shadow on your home.

As a member of our community, you are a God-fearing, law-abiding and honorable citizen and neighbor and as a community we testify here this evening to these sentiments.

We regret you deem it wise to go from among us, but there is a destiny which shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will . . . Remember, you take with you the best wishes and prayers of the little community left behind you and if your memory wanders back, as it will, to your old home where lies she who was the dearest to you, this testimonial will remind you that there is a warm place in our hearts for you and yours . . . we commend you as a respected brother to those among whom you may cast your lot. We unite in hoping that the blessings of the Lord rest upon you and that peace, health and prosperity be your portion is our fervent prayer.

The citizens of Dry Fork.

It was a difficult journey and took almost a month to go from Vernal to Green River, Wyoming. The Green River at Brown's Park was swift and treacherous and to cross in their wagons was very dangerous. Also crossing Diamond Mountain was a challenge, no road at all and often the men had to tie ropes to the high side of the wagons to hold them tight and keep them from falling back down the mountain side.

After arriving in Green River they continued by train. The horses, cattle and wagons were loaded on freight cars, the men went with the cattle and the women and children as passengers. At Great Falls they transferred to the "Turkey Trail" which was a narrow gauge railroad and went as far as Sterling, Alberta.

A brother of Eliza's, Eli Tracy, had gone to Canada in 1900 and he and his family were living in Magrath, Alberta. They invited all the Halls to stay with them until they were able to build their own house. They were fortunate to have a place to stay, many of the new settlers lived in dugouts in the hills or in tents.

The men obtained jobs with the Knight Sugar Company and also in Spring Coulee on the canal. The work on the canal was being done with horses pulling slip scrapers or fresnoes.

Orson and the boys built a two room house; one room for Elsie and Dave; the rest of the family had the other room. The boys slept in the attic.

Ott (Orson Jr) married Ethel Evans on 21 Sept 1905, a daughter of another pioneer family in Magrath.

A widow, Maria Price, lived in Magrath with her children Henry, Eddie and Lettie. She operated a little restaurant specializing in hot tamales and meat pies. She and Orson were married 11 March 1908. To them were born Anna Dean, Mark Richard, and June. Aunt Rye as she was affectionately called by all the family was a devoted wife and took very good care of Orson, especially in his last years when he was incapacitated by a stroke.

In the early 1900's land was being opened up north and east of the present town of Taber, at that time known as Tank 77. The Halls decided to homestead in that area near the Belly River. Orson chose land close to the river and after improving his quarter took a pre-emption on a quarter just west. Ott and Abb took land to the west of Orson; Dave and his family went to Grassy Lake. Abb married Myrtle Rawson on 22 Apr 1910.

Mary had married Berg Ellingson on 15 May 1905 and lived in Lethbridge, then moved to Medicine Hat. Fay lived with them much of the time and Leone, when about 17 years of age, went to Utah to live with her mother's family. In 1914 Fay met and married Glen Moore and on 1 May 1917 Leone married David Sprague in Utah.

Lee, the third son, went to Montana and there married Mary E Bartlett on 16 Mar 1915. Their first son was born in Great Falls and then they returned to the homestead.

Though everyone worked hard they had many happy times as a family. On Sundays all the families would get together at Orson's and Rye would fix one of her good dinners, maybe pigeons fixed in her special way or her famous tamales or meat pies. In the summer many afternoons were spent fishing for goldeye at the river or picking chokecherries in the coulees.

There were lots of rattlesnakes on their farm and everyone had to be very cautious, it wasn't unusual to see them close to the house, and on a few occasions in the house, if the door was left open.

Those homesteading days were difficult and many hardships were endured. The winters were so cold and the summers unpredictable. A good crop was often wiped out in minutes by a hard hail storm. A promising spring could be obliterated by a rainless, dry summer. There were surely days of disappointment and discouragement but they continued to plant and work and were often rewarded with a good harvest.

Drinking water was hauled up from the river in a barrel on a stone boat. Supplies were bought in a little hamlet called Purple Springs, seven miles away. The main food, staples like beef, pork, and chickens were raised and butchered, gardens were planted and well taken care of.

Orson loved horses and had many fine ones. He loved going to auctions and would always come home with a horse or cow or maybe items he didn't need and Maria would scold him. Before they went to Canada, while still living in Dry Fork, he was an avid auction attendee; although in those days they were called trading days. They were like auction sales but there was no auctioneer. People would gather in large groups and start trading things they had brought.

Orson would always attend and one time he took a team of horses, wagon, one cow and one extra horse. When he went home he had all the same equipment and animals plus one more cow and one more horse so he must have been a shrewd trader.

On November 1, 1917, Orson, Maria (Rye) and family moved into Taber and lived in a small house in the north end of town. The house had a well that provided good drinking water, not only for them but for many neighbors. He brought two horses from the farm; also two cows, two pigs and the chickens. He also brought his democrat and single buggy. A year later he built a large barn - in fact it had more room in it than the house.

Finding time on his hands, Orson decided to make another try at farming so he bought a quarter section about three miles north east of town and farmed it for several years but the drought was discouraging and he gave up farming.

In 1925 Orson had an accident with a team and wagon: he and his step-son Henry were crossing the railroad tracks west of Taber and he was thrown from the wagon, breaking two or three ribs. Orson only owned one car in his life, a 490 Chev which he bought about 1916. He preferred his buggy and his beautiful Bally.

Orson's grandson Earl, whose mother Mary Ellingson died 24 May 1919, went to live with Orson and Maria in 1919. Earl has left the following account of his life with Orson and Maria:

Thank you for inviting me to share with you some of my first-hand experiences with Grandpa Hall. My regret is that I didn't encourage him to tell me more of his life stories and that I didn't listen more attentively to the ones he did tell.

Grandpa was 65 years old when I came to live with him at age 4, and as I approach this age and watch the wild exuberance of my own 4 year old grandchildren, I wonder how he was ever able to stand it.

He must have remained quite active for a number of years, because I remember him hauling coal and grain, hay and straw, and generally keeping busy with his horses, keeping at least one team in the barn always. And then his favorite buggy horse Bally, a bay Hamiltonian with a blaze in his face, who was his pride and joy. However many horses he had in the barn he kept them curried and trimmed, but took especial care of Bally. I have ridden many miles sitting in the little box behind the buggy seat with my legs hanging over the back and the edge of the box cutting off the circulation at the back of my knees. But I enjoyed being with him so much that I never missed a chance to go with him.

He had a couple of friends living within comfortable walking distance of our home, Jerry Godfrey and Ad Van-Orman, and I liked to hang around and listen when they got together. An annual chore for them all was repairing and oiling their harnesses each spring. It had to be sunny, and Grandpa would take the harnesses all apart outdoors, repair and restitch them by hand where they needed it, then treat them with a mixture of neat's-foot oil and lampblack, well worked in, until they were shiny black. He'd shine up the steel and brass parts and replace any decorative "spots" that were missing, then put them together and hang them in the barn ready for use. He was particularly careful of the collars and collar pads, fitting them carefully and keeping them clean. Sometimes a horse would develop a tender place on his shoulders when

spring work first started. This called for "Gamboult's Gall Cure". I must have been able to read by now because in bold print on the bottle it advised to "be sure and work the horse".

Grandpa had a pattern every morning – up at 5:00, winter and summer, shake up the old Home Comfort range in the winter, or kindle a new fire in it in the summer, out to tend his horses, then back in the house to wait until breakfast was ready. We always had eggs, sometimes bacon, mostly unsmoked, and invariably, hot 'sody' biscuits. The old Home Comfort had to be just right to bake the biscuits just right, burned on the bottom, burned on the top and dough in the middle. Grandpa ate the dough in the middle and I got the scorched tops and bottoms and I just loved them. There must have been some variety in our noon meals, because I don't remember them, but supper was as predictable as breakfast: bread and milk. Grandpa was a purist, and I was half grown before I realized how much better bread and milk was if you spilled a little Roger's golden syrup on it.

Aunt Rye had a milk cabinet where we stored our milk, to let the cream rise. It was about 16 inches square and maybe 4 feet high, with shelves about every 4 inches. She had a number of pans, maybe 3 inches deep and 14 inches in diameter, into which the milk was strained night and morning. These were always arrayed in the milk cabinet, starting from the top, and as many as the supply dictated. The pan on the top from the morning's milking was always skimmed and the cream was used for Grandpa's bread and milk that night. No matter what happened to the rest of the pans, that one was held sacred, a sort of status quo, effectively settling anyone's mind as to who was the head of that house. From the other pans the cream was regularly skimmed, kept until a suitable sized batch was ready, properly conditioned and placed in a tall earthenware jug, maybe 10 inches in diameter and 18 inches high with a loose fitting wooden lid with a hole in it that would permit a broom handle to go through. Fastened on the lower end of the broom handle was a four spoked paddle. When the cream was ready, Grandpa would sit and dash the paddle up and down in the churn until the butter "came".

We had a good well, thirty feet from the house, from which Grandpa drew a fresh bucket of water for each meal. Many times I have heard him say, after quaffing an oversized glassful of it, "Good bread, good butter, good water, who wants anything more?". As far as I can remember, water from the well was his only beverage.

One of Grandpa's weaknesses was auction sales, and many a trip did old Bally make to them, often leading one horse to the sale, and a different one home. I don't remember them all, but remember that he finally ended up with a team that satisfied him, Frank and Clip, one a dark sorrel and the other a bright sorrel. Each winter when Christensen's Ice Company filled their huge ice shed, Grandpa and his team would hire out as a "snatch team" to help the other teams pull their loads up the river hill. For this purpose he had a small two wheeled cart made, just a tongue, a heavy axle, two wheels and a seat with a heavy chain attached. All of the horses were sharp shod and Grandpa made sure that Frank and Clip had new caulks in their shoes whenever they needed them, as they spent the whole day going up and down the hill. Seldom did Grandpa complain about anything, but sometimes some of the drivers would

let their teams slack when Grandpa was "snatched on", leaving his team to do most of the work. This rare complaint prompted me to resolve that if I ever got to be part of a team, I would pull my share of the load. I remember in 1926 when there was a push on to grow sugar beets in our area, Grandpa, Frank and Clip, and the ice cart were in a local parade displaying the banner "Grow Sugar Beets".

The winter of 1927-28 Grandpa and Aunt Rye spent in California with Uncle Lee and Aunt Leone and Aunt Faye. During this time Grandpa suffered a severe stroke which robbed him of his speech, paralyzed his right side, and invalidated him for the rest of his life. Everett Alexander helped Aunt Rye bring him home in the spring, and a pretty sober homecoming it was. This vigorous, independent spirit would be confined in his unresponsive body for as long as he should live.

I'll just note a few of my observations of this sad and final phase of Grandpa's life.

This turn of events brought out the very best in Aunt Rye's character. Grandpa, in his condition, was about all that this small but sturdy woman could handle; get him up in the morning, primitive toilet facilities, washing him, combing his hair, a human crutch under his right arm every time he moved, bed to the chair, chair to the table, often feeding him, table to the couch, to the big chair, to the table, the couch, the chair, and at the end of the day back to bed, reading to him, responsive to his every need. What sacrifice, what devotion. Such love! I'm sure that only in retrospect have any of us even partially appreciated this service.

Another act of Christian service that I noted was performed by his barber. Heber Russell had been Grandpa's barber before the stroke, and when Grandpa returned home, he regularly called on him every Sunday morning, shaving him, trimming his hair, and bringing him the "man talk" from uptown, that our household could not supply. Hebe was anything but active in the church at this time in his life but later repented. I suppose some of the faithful wondered where Hebe went every Sunday morning, instead of being in church, but I guess in the final evaluation there are many, many ways to serve.

It is my sincere hope that these few lines will help share with the rest of you the impressions that Grandpa made on me in the ten years it was my pleasure to live with him.

Orson Hall died on 9 May 1929 and was buried in the Taber cemetery where Maria joined him on 28 March 1951.