

Wednesday, April 27, 1960

NOV 29 2004

Presto Man Looks Back To Oxen, Wagon Days

By Mrs. Daphne Jennett
Staff Correspondent

BLACKFOOT, April 27 — After spending nearly three quarters of a century in the Gem State and almost 60 years in the water-shed area of the Blackfoot River, 84-year old Willis D. Higley of Lower Presto can look back to change on change.

He is one of the few old timers who can remember the oxen as work animals, and the long mule trains that used to tromp their dusty way across the Snake River desert. He has used wagons, buckboards, buggies and cars as means of transportation and has seen the hot-trod challenge the bucking bronco for thrills. He has watched as the horse-drawn machinery was almost entirely replaced by motor driven equipment on the farm and vehicles run on the saddle pony a close second at round-up time.

He has seen children trudge their way through wind and weather to the old school house, weighed down with heavy clothing against the cold, compared to today's youngsters, picked up by huge heated buses and taken to ultra-modern air conditioned buildings.

Is it better? Higley thinks that is a hard question to answer. It is certainly easier. But the old days had a lot to offer. And he looks back with more than a little nostalgia.

First Pony

Born in Erda, Tooele County, Utah, April 1880, Higley remembers that he was just six when he got his first pair of boots. Someone had given him a pony. It was a good pony, too, but his mother wouldn't have it on the place after it had thrown a sister who tried to ride it. He smiles now, when he remembers how disappointed he was, and how much better he felt when he "traded" it for some overalls and a real pair of boots.

He thinks he was about eight when the family moved to Idaho and settled down in the Ratt River country. It was there that Willis and his brothers broke two oxen to work.

Higley thinks it must have been about 60 years ago that he came to Presto. His brothers, Charlie and Elihu, were with him and they stayed overnight at the stage station at Kunball, run by a man named Heaton.

First Cattle

Charlie didn't stay long, but Elihu did. He and Willis, as Higley is affectionately called by young and old, worked together as partners for a good many years. They worked and saved until they could buy 14 head of cattle; built up the herd until they had 50; then they mortgaged them to buy more.

Those first cattle were good, big stock, half Durham, half Hereford. Even the bull was a half and half. He remembers that it weighed out at 2,900 pounds when it was sold.

The Higley brothers ran their stock up on the Upper Blackfoot River. They "squatted" on a piece of land just a few miles below where the government reservoir is now. They built a willow house to live in until logs could be got out to build a better one, and they dug three miles of ditch with only a shovel, to get water onto the hay.

Long Winter

It was a long way from the mountain place to the valley, so when they had the hay the cattle would be wintered right there. One winter, Higley remembers, Elihu stayed at the ranch they had rented in Presto, while he stayed with the cattle. He saw only two people during the winter, from November till the middle of April. A man came over from Chesterfield on Christmas day and brought the mail. He stayed all night, then Elihu came up about the middle of March and stayed all night. That was a long winter.

Willis used to cook for the round-up crew when they gathered the cattle in the fall. One year he fed 50 men and two women. That was when Bob Eldridge brought his wife and baby with a girl to take care of the baby while Mrs. Eldridge helped with the cattle.

One morning after the rest were



Willis D. Higley

gone and Willis was clearing up after breakfast, the baby woke up crying, but the sitter didn't. He couldn't wake her by calling, so he shot a squirrel out by the tent. That woke her up.

It is a long time ago, but Higley remembers how hard the Presto folks worked to build the old rock school house, now torn down and hauled away.

At that time the social life of the community centered around the school house.

One evening it was a basket social. He was there carrying Carrie Hansen's basket proudly. Everything went along fine, with the men gayly "swinging their partners" until it was time to auction off the baskets.

Now, every one knew Carrie had come with Willis, and that it was more or less his privilege to buy her basket. However a hopeful cowboy, almost as determined as Willis himself, bid against him, again and again. When it was finally settled with the stubborn cowboy definitely out-bid, Higley said, he had to dig down in his pocket for \$20.

Willis married the Drew place, but when Ralph was just a few months old they bought the farm at Lower Presto where they live now.

There was a two room log house on it. Elihu and his wife lived in one room and Willis and Carrie in the other, with tents put up out in the yard to take care of the overflow. Later they built a frame house close by and Elihu and his family moved into that. Later Willis and family moved into the frame house. It has been home to them ever since.

Never Empty

However, the little log house has never been empty. It has been in continuous use since the Higleys bought it in 1916. They aren't sure just how old it is, but know it had been built several years before that.

One of the younger boys, Dave, his wife Marie and their four boys live there now, while Dave runs the farm, and the little house is the same hive of industry that it has always been.

It has acquired an additional frame room and the usual modern conveniences, plus a house-to-house telephone so that the young folks can keep easy track of the older Higley's needs. But, to see it is like going back into another era when life was not so complicated.

Yes! Willis Higley will agree, life has changed. But for the better or the worse . . . who is wise enough to say?

January 17, 1995

Bingham County
Water Resources Board:

To Whom it May Concern:

My Uncle Willis O. Higley and my Father E. Rihm C. Higley took possession of land upon the Blackfoot River, in Bingham Co.

I am enclosing a copy of a Newspaper clipping telling of ^{my} Uncle Willis Higley's life upon the Blackfoot River.

He tells of the ditch he & my Father dug with shovels. The ditch was approx 3 miles long. This was done to get water to their property.

I was born at Presto, Bingham County, Idaho in Nov 1912. I spent time on the aforementioned property, during three Summers. My Father & Mother spent time there.

I remember my Father taking me with him to work on & clean the ditch! He also took me fishing there. We fished in the Blackfoot River.

The Indian Reservation was just across the River. Three of the Indians came over and ate dinner with us. I was scared of them and cried. They laughed at me.

My Mother Mary J. (Jeeples) Higley died in April 1917.

One year later Father brought my sister O & I to his older sister Harriet (Higley) Ketchum.

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Who lived in Indian Valley (Adams County)
Idaho.

That is where I grew up.
I was always interested in the Ranch
on the Blackfoot River. Dad talked about
it often. My first trip back to Prato
was in 1924.

I remember asking about the Ranch, the
Ditch and the Water Situation, on several
occasions through the years.

Yes I was quite young but I sure do
remember my Father working on that Ditch.

Sincerely

Evert T. Higley

3328 N.W. 2nd Ave.

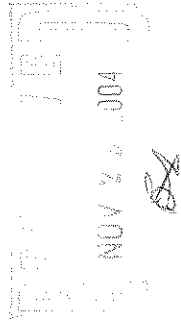
New Plymouth, Idaho 83655

Phone 1(208) 278-5529

Evert T. Higley

State of Idaho ss.
County of Payette --
On the 19th day of January, 1995, before me
came Evert T. Higley, his known to be the
individual described in and who executed the foregoing instu-
ment and acknowledged that he executed the same.

[Signature]
Notary Public
P-24-97



112233

THIS INDENTURE, made this 1st day of August, 19 68,
between JOHN SHARP and MATTIE G. SHARP, /husband and wife
aka Martha G. Sharp
of Preston, County of Franklin, State of Idaho
the parties of the first part and MALVERN L. WALLACE and MALVERN S. WALLACE, A
PARTNERSHIP

County of Bingham, State of Idaho, the parties of the second part,
WITNESSETH, that the said parties of the first part, for and in consideration of the sum of
One and no/100 ----- Dollars
lawful money of the United States of America and other valuable consideration
to them in hand paid by the parties of the second part, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged,
have granted, bargained, sold, and by these presents, do grant, bargain, sell and convey and confirm unto
the said parties of the second part, and to their heirs and assigns, forever, all the following described
real estate, situated in Bingham
State of Idaho, to-wit:

TOWNSHIP 4 SOUTH, RANGE 39 EAST OF THE BOISE MERIDIAN

Section 24: E $\frac{1}{2}$
Section 25: E $\frac{1}{2}$; SE $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$
Section 36: W $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$; NE $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$

TOWNSHIP 4 SOUTH, RANGE 40, EAST OF THE BOISE MERIDIAN

Section 19: Lots 3 & 4; E $\frac{1}{2}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$
Section 30: All

Subject to prior Mineral Reservations however evidenced.

RECORDED
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TOGETHER with all and singular the tenements, hereditaments and appurtenances thereunto belonging or in anywise appertaining, and the reversion and reversions, remainder and remainders, and rents, issues and profits thereof; and all estate, right, title and interest in and to the said property, as well in law as in equity of the said parties of the first part.

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD, all and singular the above mentioned and described premises together with the appurtenances unto the parties of the second part, and to their heirs and assigns forever. And the said parties of the first part, and their heirs, the said premises in the quiet and peaceable