

THE HISTORY OF WILLIAM DANCE BITTON

My History As I Remember It

Written by William D. Bitton (Spring 1980)

I was born December 7, 1890 in West Weber, Weber County, Utah. I was the seventh child of John Wintle and Sarah Jane Dance Bitton. There were eleven children in our family, seven boys and four girls; Frances, John, Harry, Alice, Louis, Parley, William, Bertha, Lawrence, LeRoy, and Gladys.

When I was about four or five years old, I remember going with my older brothers driving our cows to the pasture. It was a short distance from home. We would put them in a lane leading to the pasture. My Grandma Dance lived about two or three blocks from us in a small town site and she had a little dog, which we could take with us when we went to the pasture to get the cows. He would go out in the pasture all alone and bring the cows up to the lane where we would get them.

We had a neighbor next to us who had cows and they would get out in his corn patch. His name was Jim Hunter. I remember we had a big cherry tree and others. One occasion I never forget, I was up in this tree one day and I could see his cows getting in his corn patch. Although a small boy, like small kids are, I started yelling, "Jimmy, oh Jimmy, your cows are in your corn." My mother came out of the house to see what was going on.

In the spring when I was six years old, we were going to move from West Weber to Wilson Lane near Ogden. Before leaving I remember we were having a May Day Party and my brother, Parley, and I were going to sing a song. That night early Mother dressed us up in our knee pants, my first, and we went over to grandma Dance's to let her hear us. I will never forget that night. She sat on a chair, put her arms around us, one on each side of her, and said; "Now I want you to sing your song for me." And sing we did! We went from there to the party where we sang it again. That was about the last I remember in West Weber where most of us were born. I sure missed not seeing Grandma and Aunt Puah. She was mother's sister and I loved them both.

When I was six years old we moved from West Weber to Wilson Lane, which was half way to Ogden. About my first remembrance there was when my Sisters Francis and Alice were doing a washing one day and I was home with them. We were the only ones home. One of them was wringing the clothes from the washer into the tub. The wringers those days were hand turned. There were two sets of cogwheels on them. I was standing on the opposite side and I put my hand up to touch the cogs and my middle finger went through them and mashed the end for which I still wear a scar clear down to the first joint. (I'd say a dumb kid huh?)

The next spring when I was seven, Father rented a farm at Slaterville about four or five miles away and with my four older brothers, we would drive over there on Monday morning and stay all week to thin sugar beets. We would batch it, and being my first job and staying away from home, I got so homesick I could hardly stand it the first week or so. Raising beets then was all hand work, even the cultivating of one row at a time with a little garden cultivator pushed by hand.

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To get to work we drove a white mare in a single buggy and the horse was quite balky. We would be going along fine and at times she would just stop and refuse to take another step. My brothers, John and Harry would ride in the seat and Parley and myself rode in the back with our legs hanging out over the back. When the horse stopped, Harry would get out and try all kinds of ways to start her but she only went when she felt like it. One morning on our way to work she stopped. We had a chain in the buggy so Harry got out and tried swinging that chain around her front legs. Parley and myself was standing watching. All of a sudden, bang, she took off on a run with John and the three of us running to catch up. John had to stop her so we could get in the buggy. From that time on if she stopped, either Parley or I would just step around to the side of her and rattle the chain and she would start going. Sometimes we would have to run like heck to catch the buggy and jump in.

The next year father, being a paper hanger by trade, done quite a lot of papering homes. When brother Louis was home he would help. Parley would go when Louis did not and at times me, a boy of eight, would go. We would have to paste and trim and hand it to Father folded half way over. We would have to hurry to keep him going.

We moved that summer from Wilson Lane to West Ogden up on the hill just across the river and railroad tracks from the stockyards. The next summer when I was nine years old, Parley and me went to work in the beets for my oldest sister, Frances and her husband Francis T. Halverson. We lived with them all summer. We thinned and hoed beets and helped top them in the fall. That fall they came to our house to pay us. For me, I remember the handed me a small box with a lid tied on. I removed the lid and there was forty dollars, all in silver coins; dollars, half dollars, quarters, dimes and nickels, for my summers pay. All at once I felt like a "rich boy." Right after that my father was offered a nice pretty brown milk cow near Ogden for twenty dollars. I gave him the money and I became the owner of a cow for part of my work.

The next spring our parents decided to move to Idaho. Father had been to Idaho a year or so earlier and filed on some land and rented a farm south of Riverside. We were to leave on June 10th, but during the night our saddle pony strayed away, so we spend the day looking for here but could not find a trace of her. On the morning of June 11th, we left my sister and brother-in-law's home for Idaho, along with a neighbor friend of Harry's, Joe Buck, and his two boys about the same age as Parley and myself. We began the long trip for our new home with just one pony. One of us had to walk as we were driving about thirty head of cattle with us. I think I walked about one-third to one-half of the way but it was a great experience and I never did regret it. We camped from noon one day at the foot of the Malad Divide. The south slope was so thick with badgers we boys went up and threw rocks at them that afternoon. We were crossing the Big Downey Flats and those days there were no fences along the road. I was driving one of the wagons. It was very warm. I slid down off the seat and fell asleep. When they woke me, I had a hold of one rein and the team was going around in a circle out in the sagebrush, so little Willie started to trail cows again.

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A day or so later we were starting on the Reservation. I had never seen many Indians before. Little Joe Buck and I were driving the cattle. It was late in the evening and we were nearing Fort Hall. The rest of them with the wagons had gone on ahead to make camp. Little Joe was on the horse and I was walking, each of us on opposite sides of the road. Along came a buckboard toward us with one big male Indian driving and three squaws sitting on the buckboard bed behind. He just got through the cattle and stopped. He looked straight at me and here is where Little Willie thought he was going to lose his scalp with a good head of hair. I was shaking like a leaf wondering what is coming next. Then the Indian said, "Where your pa?" I said, "gone to make camp." "Then where you go?" I said "Blackfoot." Then the Indian took off down the road with my knees still shaking. Little Joe was also still shaking. Just about dark when we got to camp on Fort Hall Creek just about where the Boy Scout Monument now stands. This was my last night of camping.

We arrived at our new home one-mile south of Riverside Store on June 21, 1901. The first night we stayed with Uncle Phillip Dance who lived at Thomas, two miles west. Father was freighting for the railroad being built from Blackfoot to Mackay, so Harry, Parley and myself took care of the farm the rest of the summer. We started school where we met most of the kids in the district. Most everyone would walk with us for two or three miles, sometimes in bad weather. The farther ones would ride horses or their parents would bring them.

In the spring of 1902 Harry went to work in Blackfoot and Father continued to work for the railroad. Parley and I had to irrigate the farm. When the hay got ready to put up, Father stayed and helped us part time as he was still freighting. We had to pitch and stack by hand in those days.

Part of the land along next to the road was in sagebrush. I was out herding cows one day on the horse and was going to the house along the trail in the sagebrush. The trail forked by a big sagebrush. I was galloping the pony when I came to where the trail split. The horse took the trail I did not think he would, so I fell off in this big sagebrush and the pony kept going on to the barn.

We planted a few potatoes this spring and when we dug them in the fall, we used a plow and had to scratch them out of the dirt with our hands. I caught cold crawling on my knees and lost my voice. I could not speak louder than a whisper. For nearly a year they gave me all kinds of medicine. One lady told Mother to have me take a raw egg every day. I got the first one down but never any more. Then another lady said to give me a dose of epicake to make me vomit, and that did not last very long nor do much good. It seemed like every lady had a different cure. Parley and me sang quite a lot as kids but my voice was never the same after that spell.

In 1903 Father did not go back to work as the railroad was finished to Arco, so we started to build our new home a half mile west of the Riverside Store. In the spring of 1904 we

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moved into our new home. During most of this summer I worked raling and burning sagebrush for ourselves and my brother-in-law, Frank Halverson.

The next spring I worked for a Mr. Bales burning sagebrush. There were two horses and a little year old black colt running in the road this summer so I found out who owned them and went to see if I could buy the colt. The owner could not speak very good English. I asked him if he would sell me the colt. He said, "I tink about it." I went back again and he said, "I sell to you." I asked him how much he wanted for her and he said, "I take tree dollars." I paid him and went home and my brother, Parley, helped me get her in the corral and catch her. She turned out to be a real nice pony.

In the spring of 1906 Father rented 160 acres across the road from the Halversons. This was the year I got my first real experience farming, plowing, irrigating, mowing, and threshing hay. The threshing in those days was by horsepower, and the stacking of the straw was horrible. It would get so dusty at times we would have to leave the stack to get our breath. It was most always the kid's job, more or less. It sure seemed good when the straw blower came out and no more stacking by hand was required.

We had put up a big crop of hay and straw this season. Father's brother (Louis) and his partner, known as the Lindsay Bitton Company, was feeding sheep at the sugar factory during the winter, so Father sold hay and straw to them. We had to haul three loads a day, rain, snow or cold. I started school in the sixth grade but had to quit to haul hay all winter. This was the end of my schooling. My brother, Louis, Frank Halverson and myself hauled hay for three winters. I remember one morning it was 42 below zero but we still had to haul hay and straw. We would let the horses go by themselves and walk behind the load to keep warm. My team was one black and one white horse. When we would get home, mine would both be white with frost.

In the summer of 1906 my pal, Ancle Peterson and I went to work for the sugar company. We rode a bike four miles and worked for twenty cents an hour. We cultivated and irrigated sugar beets most of the time the first year. I used a two-row cultivator pulled by one horse and had to walk behind to guide it. The next summer I had the honor of operating the first four-row cultivator used in Idaho, which I rode and steered with my legs. We worked in the sugar factory for a while that fall, then I hauled hay again all winter. We worked three summers for the sugar company.

As Ancle and I worked together I became acquainted with his sister, Sadie. As she packed his lunch each day she put in an extra cookie, cake or an apple for "Willie."

I married my sweetheart, Sarah Alice Peterson, 28 September 1908. This marriage was later solemnized in the Logan Temple, 3 May 1934. We lived on town site and I continued to work with my father. Our first daughter, Alice Delilah, was born here. Soon after this we moved into a little house down the block from father-in-law Peterson's store. In order to buy this house I had to trade in my little horse, which was my pride and joy, or no deal. I think I cried a little that day over my horse, of course.

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About 1909 Father bought a section of land west of town site, and gave each of us boys 40 acres. Later we built homes on them. In 1911 our first son, William Vernal, was born. In 1912 we moved into the old rock house near Moreland, which we shared with my brother Louis and his family. Leona was born here in 1912. Later we moved into a little two-room house a mile west of Riverside. We later moved this house across the road to my 40-acre plot, given me by my father. We continued farming and Mom worked hard caring for our children, canning, gardening, sewing. She made all the children's clothes. Dorothy Iola was born here in 1916. The next summer I bought our first new kitchen range, a Home Comfort, a beauty which Mom loved. (I still have this range at my home in Mackay, (1980). This was the year of the big freeze. Our potatoes and beets froze in the ground and the grain was severely damaged. We later harvested a few of the frozen beets.

In the winter of 1917-1918, an epidemic of influenza swept through the valley during World War I. Many died from it. My eldest sister, Francis, died 2 April 1919. I remember we were all mighty sick.

A short time later Jed Taylor bought this forty-acre farm from us. Brother Harry and family moved to Swan Valley, so I bought his place, which had joined mine on the East. This was a four-room house. We had four children by now and were crowded for space but made do just fine. We had a folding bed in our parlor, which was convenient. Here I spent long hours farming, and going to church. I worked in the Sunday School and Priesthood and Mom worked mostly in the Primary and Relief Society. In this home Zelma was born in 1920, Audrey in 1921 and Darwin Dee in 1926.

In 1924 we acquired our first battery-operated radio, which our children enjoyed so much; also our first used automobile. Our transportation was mainly walking and horse and buggy up till now.

Finally the electricity came to Riverside from Blackfoot. This was a happy time for our families as we were able to have our first powered washing machine and an iron, also a light in each room.

The first real sorrow came into my life as my father suffered a stroke in 1921, which left him bedfast. This was hard on mother, as they had no plumbing or facilities to care for him. They soon moved to Salt Lake where he could be cared for and near a doctor. He died here on 4 January 1925. I went to Salt Lake to attend his funeral. My mother later returned to Riverside to be near her daughters. She died 21 April 1944.

As our children were growing up we enjoyed many happy times together. Each 4th and 24th of July was special in those days. We began the day with a patriotic program in the morning, a picnic at noon, followed by all sorts of games and races for the children in the afternoon, and best of all for me a baseball game, usually with a near by ward. I played mostly on a base. This was followed by fireworks and a dance in the evening. I remember Mom working long hours sewing dresses for our girls and shirts for the two

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boys. Baseball continued throughout the summer. I have fond memories of the many hours I spent practicing and playing ball. My family and I worked each Saturday morning doing necessary chores, etc., so we could all attend the Saturday afternoon baseball games. We played our nearby communities and even traveled to Fort Hall a few times to play with the Indians.

We had a little one-horse drawn cutter (sleigh) and a tame horse. Our children spent many hours in wintertime with this outfit, which they could hook up the horse to the cutter by themselves.

Summer times our children helped us raise a garden, thinned beets, tended chickens and turkeys and swam in the old canal. These were happy times and sometime hard times, as we worked to pay mortgages, taxes and just to make ends meet.

My sister, Bertha, died in 1930, which was a blow to all of us.

In the spring of 1932 we moved into my fathers old home place. We remained here until March 1935 when we sold out and moved to Mackay. Thus ending our days in Riverside except for all fond memories. We left in Riverside our three oldest children, married now, two grandchildren expected soon.

The first death in our family was when our fourth daughter, Iola, and Blaine Cook lost their first baby in 1936, with pneumonia. He lived only three weeks.

Our first ranch in Mackay was a good one where we raised good hay and grain and raised cattle. We also milked cows at one time and sold cream. Our children and their families from Riverside visited us often and we them.

One of my favorite pastimes was going fishing. We had a river nearby so I spent many happy hours there. I recall our children telling me that Mom would worry had I not come in by dark. Eventually they heard me whistling a merry tune and knew I was coming in, usually with a fine catch of fish. I did not care to eat them, however.

We sold this ranch in 1943 to our daughter Leona and C. A. Anderson. I bought the old Pritchett place nearby and later the Cattrell property, which joined it. We lived here until the spring of 1956 when Mom (my wife) suffered a stroke and we moved into Mackay upon her release from the hospital. Our ranches were left in care of our boys.

I will make mention here that in 1939 I was appointed clerk for the school district and also as a commissioner for the Independent Highway district, on which I served for about 14 years. I also had the Allis-Chalmers Agency in Mackay to sell tractors and parts.

Early in 1959 our daughter-in-law, Hortense, Vernal's wife, had surgery for a malignant tumor, which took her life on 16 August 1960. This was a great loss for our son and all our family, as we all loved her very much.

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In 1962 my sister, Alice, died, John in 1963 and brother Harry in 1966.

As Mom was still bedfast, I spent many hours at home with her. We had Edna Ivie come in days to care for her while I went to the ranch to tend water or help in the hay. She and I were alone nights. Our two daughters, Alice and Leona, kept up our washing and ironing. All of our children brought us many cooked dishes and goodies.

My brother, Lawrence, was living in his trailer on my property here in Mackay about this time. As I went over one morning to call on him I found him dead. This was a great shock to me. I immediately called Louis. This was in 1965. They moved his trailer house to Lew's soon after his death.

Mom did not seem to make any improvement and on 29 September 1967, after 11 ½ years of being an invalid, she slipped away quickly and peacefully.

I continued to cling to my old life style of ranching by helping the boys out with whatever I could do.

Tragedy struck again on 6 April 1972 when our fifth child Zelma Lindburg died, following a second heart operation. This grieved me deeply but I felt there was a great reunion there with Mom and Hortense.

The decision was made to sell the ranch in 1975. We held an auction sale May 1, 1976, keeping only a few keepsakes, like an old harness, a small tractor, a few tools, etc. Thus terminating my hard working days as a farmer, rancher and cattleman.

I have seen many changes during my lifetime. From coal stoves, kerosene lamps, washboards, hand water pumps, horse and buggy, horse drawn implements, dirt roads and much more, to all electric kitchens, appliances, automobiles, airplanes and jets, tractor, combines, two world wars, school buses, men on the moon, medical discoveries, IV's and computers, paved highways, sprinkling systems and much more.

At the present time, Spring 1980, I am still living alone, in my 90th year, at my home in Mackay. I enjoy my family and friends, who drop in each day. It is especially nice to see my grandchildren, great grandchildren and even great great grandchildren, when they are able to visit in Mackay. My T.V. is company for me and I am still able to do my own yard work in the summer. The Lord has been good to me in my declining years and I am grateful for each day of my life.

I am very proud of my posterity, which now numbers one hundred and thirty six. We hold a family reunion each summer and as many as possible attend it.

We have also taken a five-generation picture with five of the different families of my children.