

The Westward Journey to the Grand Valley

By Keith Lammey, President

As a lifelong student of genealogy complimented by a bit of natural curiosity of history, I enjoy learning about the early settlers of the west; especially the history of individual families who migrated from the east coast to or toward the west coast. My family genealogy research reveals that my ancestors were among the many settlers that made the westward journey.

Recently I discovered the book, "Ida – Her Labor of Love," by Carol Crawford McManus which tells the four and ½ decade long history of Ida Oyler Herwick and the Herwick family's journey from Phillips County, Kansas to the Grand Valley and, ultimately, to Battlement Mesa. Many long-time residents know that the Herwick family was among the first white settlers of the Grand Valley.

McManus, Ida Oyler Herwick's granddaughter, begins the story of the Herwick's westward journey in May 1873 when the family lived in Tekamah, Nebraska and traces the family's movement from Nebraska, to Kansas and, eventually to Battlement Mesa, Colorado and the Battlement Mesa Cemetery where Ida Oyler Herwick was laid to rest on March 10, 1919. For anyone seeking to understand the Grand and Eagle River Valley's early settlement history, "Ida – Her Labor of Love" is required reading.

The history of the Herwick family's 46 year epic journey from Nebraska to the Grand Valley and their trials and tribulations is not unlike that of many of the early settlers who packed up their few possessions and followed a sometimes indirect but always westward path from the Mississippi to the Pacific Ocean or somewhere in-between. In fact, there are many similarities with my family history.

In December, 1876 the Josiah Lafayette Herwick's were living in Phillips County, Kansas. As a reference point to the era, you may remember that General George Armstrong Custer and one-third of the 7th Cavalry were wiped out at the Battle of the Little Big Horn on June 25, 1876 or that on August 2, 1876 "Wild Bill" Hickok was shot and killed while playing poker at a saloon in Deadwood, South Dakota. In 1876 the west was still largely unsettled, was a dangerous place to live and the settler's life was a day-to-day struggle to survive.

My paternal great-great-grandfather, Josiah Lammey was among the first settlers of Smith County, Kansas which shares its eastern border with Phillips County, Kansas. Smith and Phillips County, Kansas were created in 1867 when an unorganized part of the western portion of the state was divided and 34 new counties were formed. Prior to 1867, this vast land tract in what became northwestern Kansas was part of the Indian Territory. All of my grandparents, both maternal and paternal, were born in either Phillips County, or Smith County, Kansas. Like the Herwick family, my ancestors eventually left Kansas and settled on Colorado's eastern plains and later migrated to Colorado's Western Slope.

The Herwicks moved to Buena Vista in April 1881, then, in June 1881, moved to the Eagle River Valley, (when the Eagle River Valley had few women and doctors were rare). In August 1888, the family moved to Battlement Mesa.

Ms. McManus described her grandmother's first Battlement Mesa home as, "a dugout with a heavy piece of canvas tacked over the doorway." Having lost a child that she buried in the Edwards Cemetery, according to the book's author, Ida was pleased to learn that Dr. and Mrs. Hayward were among the Grand Valley's early residents.

Fifteen months after arriving in the Grand Valley, vowing to return to Battlement Mesa, Ida Herwick moved with her family to State Bridge, then to Wolcott, then to Eagle and, in 1903, to Glenwood Springs where her husband, Josiah, ranched and worked on various construction projects.

The Herwicks' September 1911 move from Glenwood Springs back to Battlement Mesa required slightly more than two days as McManus wrote in "Ida."

"The horses started off at a fast clip over the Grand River Bridge and on the main road leading down the valley towards New Castle. The little buckskin Indian pony, named "Colorow" was tethered behind the wagon. The horse was old as the

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hills – over twenty years – but there was no debate as whether the faithful old animal should accompany the family to their new home. He'd been bought from his namesake, the infamous Indian Chief, Colorow...and he'd been ridden by every one of the Herwick children."

Ida Herwick was home again, in Battlement Mesa, where "no one was rich" but you knew that everyone was there to help, if help was needed."