

Chapter 2 - UNCLE CLATE'S FOUNDATION YEARS

by Gilbert Smith, Shell, Wyoming

There are many stories about our Great Uncle Clate that still circulate among those older generations of our communities of Shell, Greybull, Basin, Hyattville, Worland, Lovell, Burlington and Tensleep here in the Big Horn Basin of Wyoming. The Price family came from the Sheridan, Wyoming area, southwestward over the Big Horn Mountains, to Shell, Wyoming in the early summer of 1893.

The homesteaders in the 1880s and 90s formed an extended family with all of the disagreements, affiliations, friendships, and close bonds which any large family experiences.

The families, whose names appear on the earliest land patents, were soon connected through marriage and business -- primarily of buying and selling land, cattle and sheep. And of course the most basic disputes centered around water, so precious here in this semiarid, sagebrush country.

As most families, the Prices suffered many hardships, including their first winter here when my Great Grandfather Price, (John Wesley), became snowed-in when he had gone to purchase the family's yearly supplies.

Living in a two-room cabin, all the children and Great Grandmother during that bitter winter when neighbors shared food and the boys hunted for what game there was - mule deer, cottontail and jack rabbits and perhaps a few resident Canada geese and mallard ducks, they all made it through.

Of the children, there was Great Uncle Clate who was the oldest son and was 19 years old that win-

ter. And there was his older sister and 8 younger brothers and sisters.

Uncle Clate apparently made some minor improvements on the old Pence homestead cabin in which they stayed that first winter. (Great Grandfather had purchased a homestead relinquishment from Pence.) My Grandmother, Ota Price Smith, often told of that first winter after

which she said she could never get warm again.

Uncle Clate, as well as Uncle Floyd and Uncle Will, all took up homesteads then adjacent to the Pence relinquishment.

John and Anita Glenn Campbell, cousins from California, (Anita's grandmother, Edith, was a sister to Uncle Clate, as

well as was my Grandmother Ota) have recently done exhaustive research on the historic Price family in general, for which the tribe of John Wesley Price and Kaleida Baker Price's descendants can be extremely grateful!

As the Campbells and I searched the Big Horn County Courthouse records, we located a number of patents on homesteads filed and proved up on by Price men, and we also discovered a somewhat complicated history of land exchange among Price brothers and their parents, with sons selling to one another and to parents.

Uncle Clate filed and proved up his own homestead, and once he received a patent, gave his land to his parents.

Still, the larger picture seems to be that all the extended family was in business together. They developed the major ditch from the Shell Creek to



Family photo, 1899, Shell, Wyoming

their lands together (an engineering feat), shared machinery, and ran livestock in common.

Several sons and daughters married here in Shell, and they built their own homes and lived apart



Grandfather Price and his Prize Stallion,
original in private collection

until the time when some of the family sold their properties here to immigrate to Canada. Uncle Clate, who never married (nor are there any stories any longer on who he might have even been "sweet on"), lived with various brothers and their wives off and on, as well as with his own parents, helping to improve the others' properties, build their barns and homes, as well as paint when he could find the time.

An old-timer here, western artist and illustrator, Bob Carothers, now near ninety years old, saw Uncle Clate as his hero, and he often studied Uncle Clate's early work in order to develop his own style. He was not old enough to know Clate, but knew many old-timers who did, and always loves to tell the stories of the roundup camps in the hills and mountains here for which Clate often cooked.

Bob tells that, as the men came to camp for supper in the evenings and sat down to eat and to tell one another the big stories of their day out on the range - usually the most heroic and/or often narrow escapes - naturally, they also told the most favored stories of all the comedic happenings of the day.

Bob recalls that after the oldtimers told Uncle Clate all the news he would go into the cook tent, and with a piece of charcoal from the fire, sketch the described events on the canvas walls to the utter delight of all the men.

However, Uncle Clate's many creative talents were not limited to drawing on two-dimensional surfaces, though that was his obvious great love affair. Here, the local reminiscences also include Clate's having invented and constructed for his mother, among numerous other things, a washing machine and having carved a miniature longhorn steer of wood with rooster spurs for horns, to entertain his youngest brother who was chronically ill and finally passed away in Shell at four years of age, not long before Clate's mother also died. Both of them are buried here in Shell cemeteries.



Barn designed and built by C. S. Price, photograph by Donald R. Cook

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