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150 years of history lives on in family homestead

By Andrea Di Salvo

Families have migrated to Morrow County in many different ways—by train, by plane and by U-Haul van. Only a few can trace their families back to the pioneers of the rugged Oregon Trail.

But Dianna Hoeft can. She and husband Gerald now own and operate Midway Ranches on Upper Rhea creek, the fifth generation to live on the homestead since Dianna Wright Hoeft's great-great-grandparents Albert and Julia Barry Wright first made their home there 150 years ago.

Albert Wright was the seventh son of Jephtha and Betsey Wright, one of 14 children. He took his own small family—wife and two daughters—and set out with his brother, Anson, from Steuben County, IN, in the fall of 1852. Hoeft doesn't know the motivation behind the move, except that it was at the height of the Oregon craze that gripped the country in the 1850s.

"Everybody was going to Oregon," says Hoeft. They never saw their father again, but Jephtha wrote to Albert faithfully until 1871, shortly before his own death. "They're neat," says Hoeft says. "They're sad, but they're awesome letters."

Those 23 letters express the heartache of separation in those early pioneer days. "My dear son, I should very much like to see you all once more, but it is not likely we ever meet here on earth again, but pray that we may meet hereafter," Jephtha wrote in a letter dated Nov. 16, 1869. "Do write often and let me know how you all are."

The group overwintered in Cainsville in what is now Missouri. Next, Albert and Julia had to stop in Nebraska Territory for the birth of their son, Silas. Anson went on, and it was fall of 1853 before they were able to join him in Oregon City. Anson died in 1858, and the Wrights then named another son after him. It was that younger Anson who later settled near and became the namesake for Morrow County's Anson Wright Park.

It was in the early 1870s that Albert moved east. He settled in the Upper Rhea Creek area—family history says he started building a home on the property in 1871, but a legal deed is dated 1873—exactly 150 years ago this year.

Pioneer life in what is



Original homesteaders Back Row-Silas, George & Anson Front- Julia, Albert, Julia Ann & Effie Wright -Contributed photo



Gerald and Dianna Wright Hoeft with the next generations at a recent reunion. Front row (L-R): Kenzie Hoeft, Alex Osmin, Angie Currin, Tanna Osmin, Ellie Osmin and Gerald Hoeft. Second row (L-R): Derek Hoeft, Mike Helfer and Dianna Wright Hoeft. Third row (L-R): Carley Hoeft, Quincy Osmin and Amy Hoeft Osmin. Back row (L-R): Anita Baleztena and Rick Osmin. -Contributed photo

now South Morrow County was often difficult, but it seems it was rarely boring. Albert raised horses, which his son took back to Iowa to sell, and sheep. Later generations would add more sheep, and then cattle.

Family history recalls

Indians were within five miles of the mill. 700 strong and coming this way. The women could be held no longer. Mother was nearly frantic (Wright). Mr. W. Adkins being at our place with a two horse team and old wagon, the women char-



The old homestead as it looked in the 1870s. -Contributed photo



Dianna and Gerald Hoeft in front of the original homestead. -Photo by Andrea Di Salvo

that Native Americans used to come from the Columbia River on their way to the mountains. On their way up the creek, they would stop and camp near the ranch. Hoeft says they picked wool off the fences and would give the family gifts such as beads.

Other encounters—or, at least, near encounters—weren't so benign. Albert's diary records one time when the entire area thought it was under threat from attacking tribes.

An entry dated July 2, 1878, says, "This morning news was brought that the

tered it for The Dalles. ... Adkins was about as badly frightened as the women. He didn't know which way his hat was on."

On July 3, he wrote, "The news from the Indians assume a different aspect. They are learned to be on or about Long Creek and turning more to the right with the prospects or not coming this way. The house looks pretty naked with what hasn't gone to The Dalles with the women, is buried in the Alkale bank across the creek, mostly buried."

Dianna Hoeft can still



Albert Wright horse brand - 1894 -Contributed photo

point to the alkali bank where that furniture was buried. Those entries were written during the Bannock War of 1878. The tribes did veer right and headed toward Battle Mountain, where the war's decisive battle was fought only a few days later on July 8.

"Our folks got back from The Dalles July 29th, pretty tired out and badly disgusted with the Indians and Indian Raids," a later entry reads.

During the 1880s, the ranch served as a stage stop and post office. It received that distinction because it was located roughly halfway between Canyon City and The Dalles. Its location might also be the inspiration behind the homestead's name—Midway Ranches.

Albert Wright was very religious; not only did he help found the Heppner Methodist church, but he also was a circuit riding preacher for the Methodist Church. In his family Bible, along with the records of births and marriages, was a page with a temperance pledge he asked his descendants to sign—though it might be noted that not all of them signed it.

The Wright family also developed close ties to some other familiar names. Albert and Julia's daughter, also named Julia, married Timothy Bisbee, Frank Gilliam's partner in his hardware business. Meanwhile, their daughter Effie Wright married Frank Gilliam.

It was eldest son, Silas, who took over the homestead on Rhea Creek, while Anson moved to Rock Creek and George took over what the family called the Mountain Place, each a holding of about 3,000 acres. Each came with a band of sheep.

Silas married Martha Cantwell, daughter of a

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Ashbeck named player of the year

Mustang players receive all-league, all-state honors



Tucker Ashbeck -Contributed photo

All-League and All-State honors have been handed out for baseball, and Heppner's Tucker Ashbeck has been named 2023 Player of the Year for 2A/1A

Special District 7 West. He also received the honor of being named to All-League first team for pitchers, as well as 2A/1A All-State second team pitcher.

Ashbeck, a senior, graduated from Heppner High School last week. He is the son of Andy and Michele Ashbeck.

While Ashbeck tops the list as player of the year, several other Heppner players also received All-League and All-State honors that were none too shabby.

Heppner junior Cameron Proudfoot was named

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Health district looks to the future with strategic plan

By Andrea Di Salvo

The Morrow County Health District was focused on the future at its May 22 meeting as it adopted a new 2023-2025 strategic plan and approved the proposed budget for the upcoming fiscal year.

Priorities for the health district include an adult care home in Boardman, a new ambulance hall in Irrigon, expansion of occupational medicine services in all locations, and CPR and first aid training, among others.

Boardman expansions

The health district says it's focused on a new adult care home in Boardman because no assisted living options are available there currently. At the same time, a full-size assisted living facility would not be "financially feasible." MCHD plans to build a five-bed facility with a more "home-like" environment for seniors and people with disabilities.

Also in the plans for Boardman is the remodel of the health district's building there to house Boardman Immediate Care. MCHD has been providing immediate care and occupational medicine through a mobile clinic in Boardman since October of 2022. The expansion, which is designed to meet the long-term needs of the community, will include four exam rooms with offices for providers and administrative staff. The health district also plans to get the Boardman clinic certified as a hospital-based Rural Health Clinic.

The expansion of the Boardman clinic along with the addition of an occupational health registered nurse will also help expand the array and availability of occupational medicine throughout the county, the health district says.

Irrigon ambulance

The health district al-

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Irrigon council streamlines liquor application process

By Andrea Di Salvo

Irrigon City Council approved resolutions to streamline the liquor license application process and raise city employee wages at its meeting May 16 at Irrigon City Hall.

Regarding liquor licensing, the council approved a resolution allowing the city manager or other city designee to sign applications for renewals or requests for Oregon Liquor Control Commission (OLCC) licensing in the city, unless an application raises a concern that needs to go before the city council.

City Manager Aaron Palmquist said the purpose of the resolution was to ensure timely and effective

response for customers. "Annually, everyone has to do it, and in 10 years I think we've had one question," said Palmquist.

He added that there's a conflict in the state statute because a local jurisdiction has to approve Oregon Liquor Control Commission applications even though the OLCC has authority to approve or deny applications without the local jurisdiction's signature.

"What this does, it speeds up the process," said Palmquist. "Ultimately, we're just signing off on it. OLCC still approves it."

"We have historically been the slow one on behalf of businesses," he added.

"And we have plenn-

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