

150 years of history lives on

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Dianna Wright Hoeft as a child, riding in her father's saddle baskets with her pet lamb. The horse's name was Sally. -Contributed photo

pioneer family that lived in the Eightmile area. He continued to expand the family holdings, though bad asthma kept him from doing much of the work himself. He leased the ground out, then tried working it with his two oldest sons for seven years.

"So, in the winter of 1916, with five feet of snow on the ground, he leased the ranch to his third son, Orian, in the hopes that he could save all that was left of the livestock—20 head of cattle—and make the ranch viable again," wrote Bonnie Zimmerman Kiser in 1980.

Silas, like his father, was a strong Methodist. Martha Cantwell Wright was a member of the First Christian Church, and the two never reconciled that difference. The story goes that, as he was dying in



This clock came across the Oregon trail more than 150 years ago. -Photo by Andrea Di Salvo



Razor sharpener -Contributed photo



L-R Silas, Pearl, Lonnie, Delbert, Martha, Moses, Front, Orian E. and Della Wright -Contributed photo

1922, Silas asked his wife to have his funeral at the Methodist Church. In fact, a story from granddaughter Jewel Wright Hager relates that, when he was angry, he told his wife not to bury him at the Christian Church, or he would come back and burn it down.

She disregarded his wishes.

"That night, that church burned to the ground," says Hoeft.

"It did burn to the ground before the graveside service was finished," wrote Jewel Hager. "My father was not a superstitious man, but he said that he felt extremely chilled when he observed this."

Orian Elmer "O.E." Wright married Willa Pearl LeTrace. Together, the two of them and O.E.'s brother Delbert kept the ranch going through the Depression years. O.E. later partnered with sons Robert and Albert

until they moved away to seek different work.

While the land had settled some by this time, that generation still interacted with the Celilo tribe when they made their annual trek, first with travois, then with horses and wagons, and finally with vehicles. The daughter of Chief Tommy Thompson gifted O.E.'s second son, Bobby, with a pair of buckskin gloves.

Flash floods were common in the area, and Rhea Creek was no exception. A flash flood hit the area in the spring of 1934. A line of poplar trees diverted most of the wall of water from the house, but the pig pens along Spring Hollow were wiped out and "pigs were found hanging onto the trees and farm equipment," according to Kiser.

It was O.E. who bought land and cattle from Chris Renniger. He kept the Renniger CR brand, which can



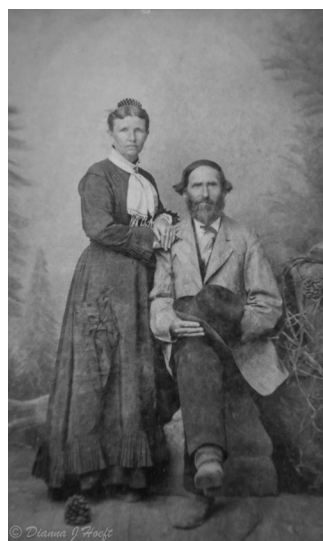
Moving sheep -Contributed photo



Joan, Clayton, Albert, Orian and Pearl Wright -Contributed photo



Ox yoke century sign -Contributed photo



Julia Ann & Albert Wright -Contributed photo



Second generation Silas and Martha Wright. -Contributed

still be seen at the ranch. A combination of disease and cheaper competition made him sell off the last of his sheep in 1955.

Orian Albert, or Albert, Wright and his wife, Beverly Marie Maness Wright, moved back when O.E. suffered a heart attack, taking over operation of the ranch in 1959. O.E. was told to retire but couldn't keep from working. He died from a heart attack with a shovel in his hand in 1969.

Hoeft's father, Albert, was the fourth generation to live on the Rhea Creek ranch. They first lived in the original homestead house, but later remodeled and enlarged a small bunkhouse. They moved into it in 1964, when Hoeft was 10 years old.

Albert continued to build the cattle herd. Hoeft has early memories of riding in saddle baskets on her father's horse when he was working cows. With her was always her pet lamb.

"The horse hated that sheep," she recalls with a laugh.

Albert was chosen Cattleman of the Year for Morrow County in 1972. It was also during Albert's time that the ranch was recognized as a centennial ranch and renamed Wright's Century Ranch.

Both of Hoeft's brothers, David and Dean, spent time working on the ranch. David moved on, but Dean

and Dianna partnered together for several years, the fifth generation to live and work on the ranch.

Dianna and Gerald Hoeft have now taken over its operation. In 2005, they began building a third home on the property. Because they are doing the work themselves, it continues to be a work in progress. The name of the property has been changed from Wright's Century Ranch back to Midway Ranches.

Along with reclaiming the former name, Hoeft has gathered an impressive collection of family memorabilia—family Bibles, knick-knacks, photos and even the desk used in the old 1880s post office. One tool, in particular, was a curiosity piece that her father used to quiz visitors. Very few, if any, guessed correctly that the small instrument was a razor sharpener.

Hoeft has completed the process of applying for sesquicentennial recognition and is waiting to hear back. According to the Oregon Farm Bureau, only 51 farms and ranches have reached the 150-year mark. "It's a pretty big deal in my opinion," says Hoeft. "Not everybody makes it that long."

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Dean, Dianna, David and front row, Albert & Beverly Wright -Contributed photo



Stairs worn down by five generations of Wright feet. -Photo by Andrea Di Salvo



Orian Elmer Wright with his sheep -Contributed photo



Saddle with Basket -Contributed photo



Wagon wheel BY homestead with DianNa's prized peony -Contributed photo

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Brand used since there were cattle on the ranch -Contributed photo