

## ALVIN ROPER

1853-1912

Alvin Roper was born 17 February 1853 in Sheffield, Yorkshire, England. His father and mother were Henry and Mary Ann Grayson Roper. Henry Roper was a Silversmith. The family belonged to the Church of England until in 1843 when they joined the Mormon Church. Henry Roper was Branch President of the Sheffield branch for a number of years before migrating to the United States.

On April 2, 1854, the family left Sheffield and went to Liverpool to set sail for America. Alvin was then 14 months of age. There was one other child, 8-year-old Harry. There had been four other children who had died in infancy.

While crossing the ocean Alvin's mother put him in a berth to sleep. One day the boat rocked back and forth and a big wave nearly washed him into the ocean. The Captain took a great fancy to the child and would take him down to his quarters and would feed him. This was much appreciated by Alvin's parents as Alvin was a delicate child and had never thrived too well. He was the only baby on the ship.

After being on the ocean three or four weeks the ship struck a coral reef in the Gulf of Mexico and was lodged there three or four weeks. They ran out of water and became very thirsty. The Captain would take the baby to his quarters and give him a drink of water but the baby was the only one that had that privilege. When they finally managed to get off the coral reef they came to an island on which they found water. Those going ashore brought back bird eggs for everyone on the vessel. After that experience, Alvin's mother could never stand to see any water go to waste. She used her wash water to water her plants and shrubs.

They landed in New Orleans June 4, 1854, two months after they left Liverpool. They sailed up the Mississippi River to St. Louis where they stayed awhile then went on to Alton, Illinois. The family lived at Alton for a number of years trying to get enough money ahead to go on to Utah. Three children were born, died and buried at Alton. They also experienced floods filling the lower story of their home with water and they had to move up to the top story.

In 1859, the family crossed the plains. Alvin would then be 6 years of age. They reached the Platte River in September and on the 23rd of that month a baby sister was born and they named her Kate Platte Roper.

As soon as they could, they went on to the Salt Lake Valley. While in Salt Lake another daughter was born 13 April 1862, and they named her Nellie. In 1863, they helped to settle Deseret. Two sons were born while they lived in Deseret, Charlie, born 1 October 1865 and Abel Mosley was born 22 February 1868. This made thirteen children in the family and only six living to maturity.

At Deseret, they lived as most of the pioneers did at that time. They had only the barest of necessities. They lived on bran bread and the fish that were caught in the Sevier River. Alvin ate so much bran bread and fish that in later years he would touch neither. He made the remark that he had eaten enough of them in Deseret to last him the rest of his life.

They raised grain, native currants and carrots. After they moved to Oak Creek they would go back to Deseret to get currants. The boys would walk up to the Oak Creek Mountains, which was a distance of about 20 miles, and they herded their cows. At that time, there was grass to the cow's knees where the town of Oak City is. They helped to build the old fort in Deseret to help protect them from the Indians. The Deseret Branch was organized in 1861 and was a branch of the Fillmore Ward.

When Charlie was a baby he had only one dress. His mother washed it out every night. She often said you didn't have to have a lot of clothes to keep a baby sweet clean.

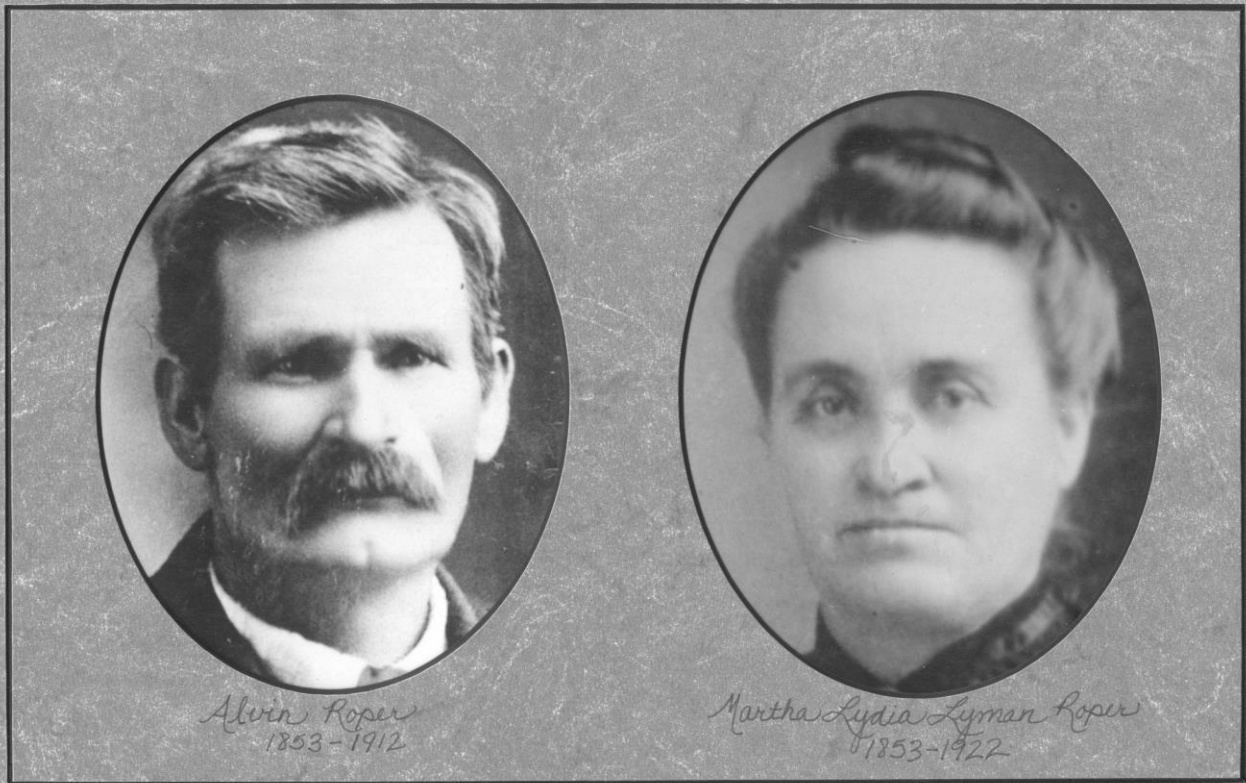
In June of 1862 the dam in the Sevier River was taken away by floods. It kept going out and the settlers could not raise any crops so most of the people abandoned their homes and moved to other towns. The Ropers went to Oak Creek in 1868. They were among the first settlers in Oak Creek. Their first home was a dugout, while a one room house was being built. It had a dirt roof. Henry Roper helped to lay out the town of Oak City.

Soon after moving to Oak Creek, Charlie and Abel were afflicted with Whooping cough. They ran for a post when they felt an attack coming on and would cling to the post as long as the coughing spell was on.

The first crops that were raised were corn and cane. They had a hard time harvesting the corn because it gave them hay fever. Alvin would never raise corn. When the time came that they could raise grain they quit raising corn. They, like the other settlers made molasses out of the cane they raised. They boiled the juice from

the cane until it was a syrup consistency. In the meantime, they skimmed off the scum as the juice boiled. At first the scum was green and they were called green skimmings. These were put in a hole that had been dug for that purpose. It was called the "green skimmings hole." At one time one of their cows fell in this hole and from then on was known as "Old Skimmings".

Alvin got a job hauling lumber from the canyon and later freighted to and from Pioche, Nevada. He had little opportunity to attend school therefore was a poor reader and knew very little about figures. He had a little book called Ready Reckoner, which he used to tell the price of everything.



He met Martha Lydia Lyman and was married to her 26 October 1874 in the Endowment House in Salt Lake City, Utah. Soon after they were called to work on the St. George Temple. Martha stayed about three months and Alvin was there one year. Their first home was in Oak City and their first child Mary Caroline was born in this home 28 July 1875. They moved to another home in Oak City and lived there until 1890. In the meantime, they had taken up a Homestead on Fool Creek Flat, 10 miles north of Oak City and about 4 miles south of Leamington, Utah. They spent their summers at this Homestead. It was patented in 1884.

Alvin bought into a Saw Mill Company with his brother Charley Roper, and his brothers-in-law, Eddie, Walter and Frederick Lyman. They brought a saw from the Oak Creek canyon and took it to the Fool Creek Canyon. They operated the business about two years. Before leaving the mill they always sprinkled water all around so no fire would start from sparks. They brought a big log to be sawed but before it was sawed the mill burned. The log is still there with a big balsam tree that has grown up beside it. Sometime afterward they took the engine and started another mill just east of Oak City. One day while they were at dinner the mill burned. Alvin sold his interest in the company and the Lyman boys went to Salt Lake and Ogden, Utah to work to pay off the debt.

In the meantime, there were six more children added to the family. Effie was born 3 August 1877, Caddie, born 9 June 1879, Hettie, born 20 May 1881, Ida born 18 October 1883, Lem, born 27 September 1885,

and Bert, born 18 August 1887.

While living at the Flat, the children made a "homemade" telephone. They cut both ends out of a salmon can then stretched hide or a bladder over one end. A hole was punched in the center of the hide, a string put in the hole with a knot in one end. The string was stretched and they could be heard 100 yards away. Another past-time for the children was to drown out quimps. They received 50 cents for each quimp killed.

Alvin and Martha's house in Leamington



In the spring of 1890, Alvin traded their property in Oak City for a place in Leamington and they moved there. Martha went back to Oak City to her mother's in August of that year where another daughter Twiss was born 31 August 1890. She took her daughter Mary with her to help. Their last two children were born in Leamington. They were Frankie, born 8 November 1892 and Kirt, born 8 May 1895.

They had many experiences while living in Leamington. The home in which they lived was made of logs. Nearby was an abandoned canal filled with weeds and was inhabited with skunks. At night, the skunks would get under the house and fight, the odor was terrible. They set traps to catch the skunks and one morning there was a big one in the trap. When they went to get it out of the trap, Bert was standing too close and got the benefit of the scent right in his face.

Sadie Overson was the school teacher. The children tried to get to the railroad track to meet her and walk to school with her. One morning she was a little ahead of them so they ran. Twiss stubbed her toe, fell on her lunch bucket and it knocked the breath out of her and she was sick the rest of the day. At another time Lem made a wager that he could run barefoot in the snow without crying, to the neighbors who lived a block away. The children went barefoot most of the time. Twiss went barefoot so long that when she got a pair of shoes she couldn't walk in them. At this time, Mary was working in her Uncle Jodie's store in Oak City and when the family came to Oak City, Mary bought Twiss a pair of shoes. Twiss put them on but couldn't walk out of the store with them on.

While living in Leamington Alvin hauled freight to and from Nephi, Utah. He would ford the Sevier River and go up Leamington canyon. He took wheat, hides and wool and bring back flour and coal oil. He made the money to pay taxes by buying and selling hides.

They still maintained their property on the Flat and Effie would go with her father and work with him. He spent many lonely hours on the Flat because he could not read. Martha read to him in the evenings when she was there. He spent hours looking at catalogues.

Mary, Caddie and Effie were married while they lived in Leamington. Effie died in childbirth after having been married less than a year. She and the little baby were buried in the same grave in Oak City.

It was while the family was living at Leamington that Alvin's sister Nellie, received word that her husband, Jodie Lyman, had been shot in the leg by horse thieves. He was out at Bluff in San Juan County. The thieves had stolen horses and cattle and Jodie had pursued them. A bone had been shattered in his knee. There were no doctors and his brother Platte had probed in and dug out a bottle full of shattered bone. He had a running sore the rest of his days. During his life when injury got to paining his children would gather prickly pear and was used as a poultice. The injured leg was two or three inches shorter than the other.

After receiving the words Aunt Nellie asked her brother Alvin to take her to Bluff. It took them two weeks to get out there. It took three weeks for a loaded wagon to get there. Alvin rested his horses a few days then returned home. Martha and children stayed with her mother in Oak City while he was gone. Effie was very sick at this time and died 23 May 1898.

The family moved back to Oak City. Alvin was very discouraged because of drought and wanted to go to Big Horn, Wyoming when Joe Lovell went but Martha didn't want to go. She finally consented to go to Bluff, Utah when Jodie Lyman moved out there. They started 26 April 1901, and it was just like a funeral when their caravan went up over the jack hill. Jodie was never coming back and Alvin didn't know whether he would or not. The whole town of Oak City was there to bid them good-bye.

It was about noon when they left and they went as far as Scipio the first day, arriving there about midnight. The next day they stopped in Scipio Canyon and caught fish for their dinner. The fish being freshly caught, nearly flopped their tails off while being fried. That night they camped near Salina Canyon. It took

them a day and a half to get through Salina Canyon. One night was spent in Ferron, Emery Co., another between Ferron and Green River and then they camped at Green River. They traveled each day until they came to water then made camp. At Green River, it cost \$14 to ferry across the river. They also had to cross the Grand River, which is now the Colorado River. Their next day's journey took them to a place where they had to pay for their water. It cost 10 cents per head to water their stock at Court House Rock. Alvin had two wagons and a buggy. Their daughter Ida had rheumatism and had to be lifted in and out of the wagon.

Jodie's family always made bread at night no matter how late it was when they made camp. One night they made bread after midnight, when it was cooked they discovered they had used sulfur instead of baking powder. As starved as the dogs were, they wouldn't eat it. Alvin's family had forgotten two sacks of potatoes so had none along the way. 15 gallons of syrup was taken. They didn't eat too much on the journey going but ate all of it on the way back home. They made a lot of water gravy that they called "Lick Dob" gravy. The little children would cry from hunger.

The roads were so bad the children were scared all the way. None of them wanted to ride with their father because he drove a horse called "Old Mag" that balked every time they came to a hill. They persuaded Twiss to ride with her father but Old Mag balked and that was enough for her. They could always tell when the horse was going to balk. She would roll her eyes and throw her head over the other horse's shoulder. When Effie was sick someone had ridden Old Mag to Salina to get a doctor and the mare was so stiff the next day she could hardly walk.

Aunt Annie had told them so much about what a beautiful place Monticello was, they were disappointed. Probably the time of year had something to do with that.

The little group of pioneers arrived at Bluff two weeks after leaving Oak City. Upon arriving they found the ditch that had been dug the year before all filled with sand. There was no water. This settled Alvin and he was ready to turn around and go right back. He and Bert went to Dolores Cortez and were gone about ten days.

The children went exploring on the Mesa to see what they could see. They went into a little canyon and heard Indian Squaws jabbering and scrambled back up the hill as fast as they could. When they got to their wagon there were 25 Indians there. The children were petrified. One squaw coming up the hill slid off the back of her horse the hill was so steep. After this Alvin gave all of his girl's squaw names. Ida was Civia, Twiss was Cheer, and Frankie was Topsy.

Alvin and family stayed in Bluff three weeks and then started for home. Two of their horses had already got away and started for home. They overtook them at Thompson Springs. At Green River, they waited and waited for the ferry to come but it never did so Alvin decided to cross on the railroad tracks, which he did. The children were frightened for fear a train would come along. They were all so hungry for meat that they bought some at Verger. Alvin would slice it off and they would eat it. At Redmond, Lem went into town and bought some eggs. They tasted so good to the hungry children. They stopped at Centerfield and visited Aunt Tena, Effie's husband's second wife.

Before going to Bluff they had sold their home in Leamington to Joe Overson. They had bought Sim Walker's place in Oak City. The home in Leamington was so far away from the church the children were not getting the religious training their parents wished them to have. This was the main reason for the move. The new home was a two-room house built of logs. It was located on the block just across the street from the school and church house. While living in this home Lem had Rheumatic Fever, also broke his arm. They later built a nice home on the corner of the same lot. They moved into this home about 1906. They still spent their summers at the Flat.

May 12, 1909, Bert went on a mission for the L.D.S. Church to the Northwestern States Mission. About this time, they had Kirt's life insured, Mary asked her mother why they didn't have Alvin's life insured. Her mother told her they were afraid he couldn't pass the examination because he had a lump on his jaw. About a year later the lump began to grow and bother him. Dr. Broadus came to town when Twiss' daughter Lorna was born. Alvin asked the doctor what he thought the lump was on his face. The doctor answered, "If I had that on my face, I wouldn't stay in this town overnight". That was April 1911. They didn't go to Salt Lake City until in June. He went to Doctors Middleton and Allen. The doctors told him there was nothing they could do, that it was Sarcoma. (Worst kind of cancer) Alvin didn't know what it was but Martha did, and on their way back to where they were staying she collapsed as she got off the streetcar. She told Alvin what it was he had and they went back to Oak City.

Alvin felt quite well but the doctors told him not to work. His jaw got stiff and it pained him so much he took morphine. The doctors told him what to do when the pain was bad. Bert came home from his mission a little early on account of his father's health. He had been in the mission field nearly 26 months but at that time they usually were gone 2 years. He came home 4 July 1911. Bert took his father to Hot Springs, South Dakota to a cancer specialist. There he was told there was nothing they could do for him. By this time, the lump was broken and was a running sore. Alvin wasn't satisfied and went back to talk to the doctor before returning home. The doctor said, "You would rather go home the way you are than in a box, wouldn't you?" The doctor was afraid that the cancer was wrapped around the jugular vein. Alvin was told to get his affairs in order within the next three months.

In the meantime, Martha had a nervous breakdown. Her granddaughter Angie, Mary's daughter spent most of the summer with Martha and Alvin at their home on Fool Creek Flat. One of Angie's assignments was to make the egg-noggs for her grandfather. There was a cellar near the house where the food was kept to be cool. This was where the egg-noggs were made. A teaspoon of brandy was put in each egg-nogg.

In September, Martha, Alvin and daughter Ida went to Salt Lake City to work in the Temple but the work was too strenuous for Martha and Alvin. Alvin had a hemorrhage in his face and they went back to Oak City. Alvin had a bad spell in October and could never lie down after that. He slept sitting in a chair for three months. A table was made for him just the right height to rest his head on but he couldn't use it nor could he lay his head back. The cancer ate a hole through his cheek and jawbone to his tongue. He lived on morphine for the last month of his life. He was so thin his daughter Mary could lift him in and out of bed. He died January 29, 1912.

Alvin felt badly because he hadn't had the opportunity to go to school. He went six weeks when they were living at Alton, Illinois. He would have been about six years of age. He was anxious that his children go to school and he oft times studied along with the children. Martha read aloud the newspapers and Bible. Mary remembered putting her fingers in her ears so she couldn't hear the prophecies of the "Last Days" it frightened her so. Alvin played the fiddle and played for dances wherever he lived. Some of his old tunes are still being played for quadrilles at the Oak City dances.

Alvin had many friends and when he died he didn't owe a cent. One of the finest was paid to him and that was that he was "an honest man".

Written by Angie Finlinson Lyman, a granddaughter.