

## DESERT LAKE AND VICTOR

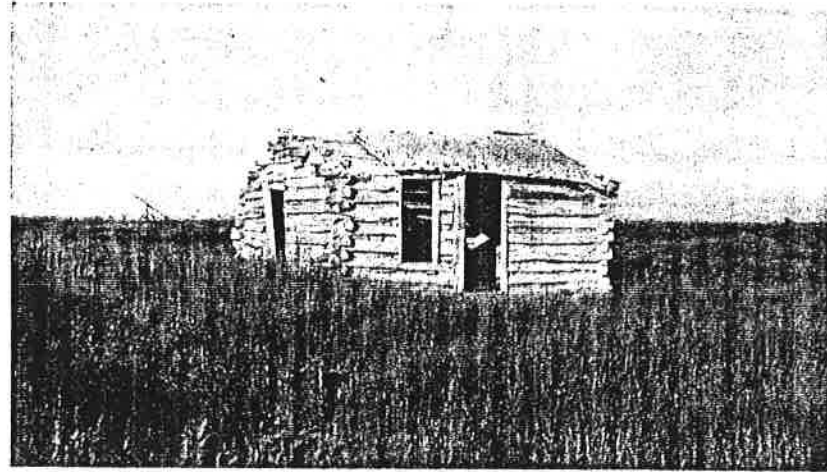
"Ghost Towns"

Desert Lake lies six miles east of Cleveland and covers an area of one half square miles.



In the spring of 1888, when Thomas Wells and his family arrived, no one else was there at the time. Two log cabins built by Hans P. Marsing and Charley Winders and a dug-out built by Samuel Wells, brother to Thomas Wells, had been constructed by these men in the summer of 1887 while they were working on the Cleveland Canal. They had taken up land in this region and had accepted stock in the Cleveland Canal for their work in order to get water with which to irrigate. They left the place for the winter but returned again in the spring of 1888.

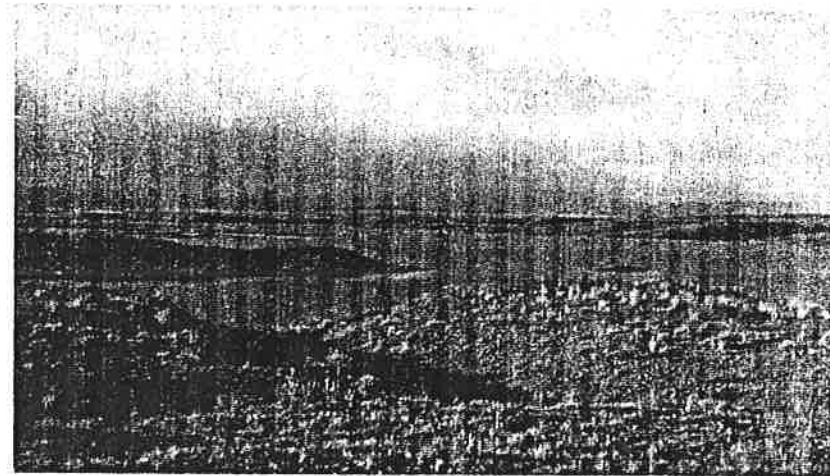
Other settlers arriving that spring were: Lois Marsing and family, Martin and Bartrum Marsing, Dan and William Powell, Sr., and his son William Powell, Jr., and also the Pilling family, mother Sarah Pilling, her two sons, John and William and two daughters, Ellen and Betsy. They lived that summer in covered wagon boxes.



*This venerable old log cabin was a pioneer home near Desert Lake—  
Owner Unknown.*

Choice locations were selected, below where the reservoir was to be built. Work was begun on the construction of a dam of five hundred feet in a natural declivity between the hills to impound the over-flow water from the Huntington creek and to provide storage space for their own water, rights to which they owned in the Cleveland canal, and also catch all the Cleveland drainage water from farms of that area.

On July 13, 1892, the Desert Lake reservoir and Irrigation company was incorporated and consisted of the following members: William J. Powell, Sr., who was appointed president and had the



work in charge, Hans P. Marsing, Martin L. Marsing, Thomas Wells, John Pilling, Lois J. Marsing, William J. Powell, Jr., Samuel Wells, Daniel J. Powell, Charles H. Winders, William Hadden, Frank Powell and J. Elmer Marsing. Other early settlers were: John L. Thayne, Amos Davis, Riley Pierce, George Herman, William Winders, Wesley Ward, Delon Pilling, James Bradley.

All were Latter-day Saints and joined with the Cleveland Ward and school district, but they were soon given a presiding elder that they might hold church services in their own ward, thus eliminating the long trips to Cleveland. Thomas Wells was sustained as the first presiding elder. Other presiding elders were: Samuel Wells, Daniel J. Powell, Jams W. Bradley and Henry G. Mills.

At first church and Sunday Schools were conducted in the tithing granary and various residences until in 1895, a small two room frame building was erected for church and school purposes. This building was also used for dances, amusement hall and all social gatherings.

A man named Peterson from Castle Dale was the first school teacher. Miss Elizabeth Johnson, daughter of Bishop Peter Johnson was also an early teacher here. They taught all the grades from the first to the eighth. The town was surveyed in 1906, and a commission as postmaster was granted to Silas Winders. The post office was known as "Desert Lake." Winders kept a small store.

#### EARLY AMUSEMENTS

Dancing was the most popular form of amusement. "Bub" Burgess and Bert Hadfield with their fiddles, Solly Robertson with piccolo and Ira Whitney with his accordion were the musicians. Programs and picnics were part of the entertainment at these dances.

House parties, sleigh riding and skating on the lake in the winter time, horseback riding, hayrack riding and buggy riding were among the forms of early amusements.

Sarah Pilling grew the first grapes and strawberries. Fruit and shade trees were planted. Soon all available land that water could be diverted to was taken up. Good crops were grown and harvested, the people prospered and Desert Lake became a very beautiful place.

In cases of sickness the neighbors helped each other as no doctors were available, but there was a midwife at Cleveland, known as "Granny Davis."

Each family had to learn to do their own shoe repairing and blacksmithing, or help each other.

Viola Wells and Sarah Pilling were the only women who owned spinning wheels. They did their own carding and spinning as well as a great amount of custom work.

Most of the ladies made their own quilts but as there was no one in town who owned carpet looms, they hired weavers in nearby

towns, and many were the happy hours spent quilting and at rag-bees.

All traveling for years was done by team and wagon or horseback. There were only two yoke of oxen and these were owned by Samuel Wells.

A young school teacher, Manassa J. Blackburn came to teach. He remained to take up land and when the ward was organized was sustained as the first bishop with Henry G. Mills, first counselor and David Powell as second counselor.

Mrs. Eliza Jane D. Smith, wife of the late Owen Smith of Huntington was postmistress of Desert Lake for many years.

Mrs. Smith lived to be 90 years of age.

Mr. Blackburn, negotiated with Joseph Powell of Salt Lake, for the purchase of land about six miles below Desert Lake that he had taken up and surveyed. He had built a good farm house, erected fences and planted shade trees and orchards, and built ponds with the full intentions of establishing a townsite. His venture proved unsuccessful and he went back to Salt Lake thoroughly discouraged. Water was brought in through the extension of canals from the Desert Lake Reservoir. Bishop Blackburn went to Huntington to teach school. Henry G. Mills was sustained as bishop in his place. The responsibility of establishing and building up the new settlement then fell to him.

In the spring of 1908, the first families moved in. These were Samuel Wells, Charles Mills, Thomas Wells, Henry G. Mills, Lewis Ray, and their families, and it was not long until the rest also moved, although they continued to farm at Desert Lake.

It was a hard struggle, trying to put over this project without aid from outside sources and it wasn't too successful. In August 1896, the dam broke and many had narrow escapes from drowning. It was repaired some but the job was not satisfactory. The Latter-day Saints church then came to the rescue with a thousand dollars which helped to repair the dam. By this time, however, so many of the Cleveland farms had gone swampy and the water from these, draining into this reservoir, made the water unfit for culinary use or for livestock. Finally this alkali water began to injure the crops and to swamp the land in this area also, so a new townsite was sought.

A post office was petitioned for and granted. Emily F. Wells was appointed postmistress, and the new settlement received the name of Victor. Osborn B. Cooley opened up a small grocery store.

The ward organization was transferred to the new town and Henry G. Mills continued as bishop. Eliza Mills was chosen as Relief Society President with Emily L. Olsen and Emily F. Wells as counselors. Emily F. Wells was sustained as Primary President.

In 1910, the school board granted a contract to Thomas Wells to make cement blocks for the construction of the new school house.

This building was soon finished and was not only used as a school but as a church and for all social gatherings.

In 1918, Henry G. Mills left the town and Thomas Wells was put in as bishop with John Alma Olsen, first counselor and William Pilling as second. Emily L. Olsen was chosen as President of the Relief Society with Emily F. Wells, as first counselor and Viola Wells as second counselor. Betsy Ward was Secretary-Treasurer.

The venture had been such a long hard fight that the people finally became discouraged and left for more prosperous places. The ward was discontinued and joined to the Elmo ward, and Victor became a ghost town.—*Thomas Wells*

# Towns struggled hard, didn't last long

By CHUCK ZEHLER  
Managing editor

The two Emery County ghost towns of Desert Lake and Victor are so similar and so close to each other, that the two towns could almost be considered one.

As one died, the other grew — mostly with the people leaving the one to live in the other. In the 1920s both towns were abandoned and the desert began its relentless reclaiming of the arid townsites.

But 35 years earlier, things were different.

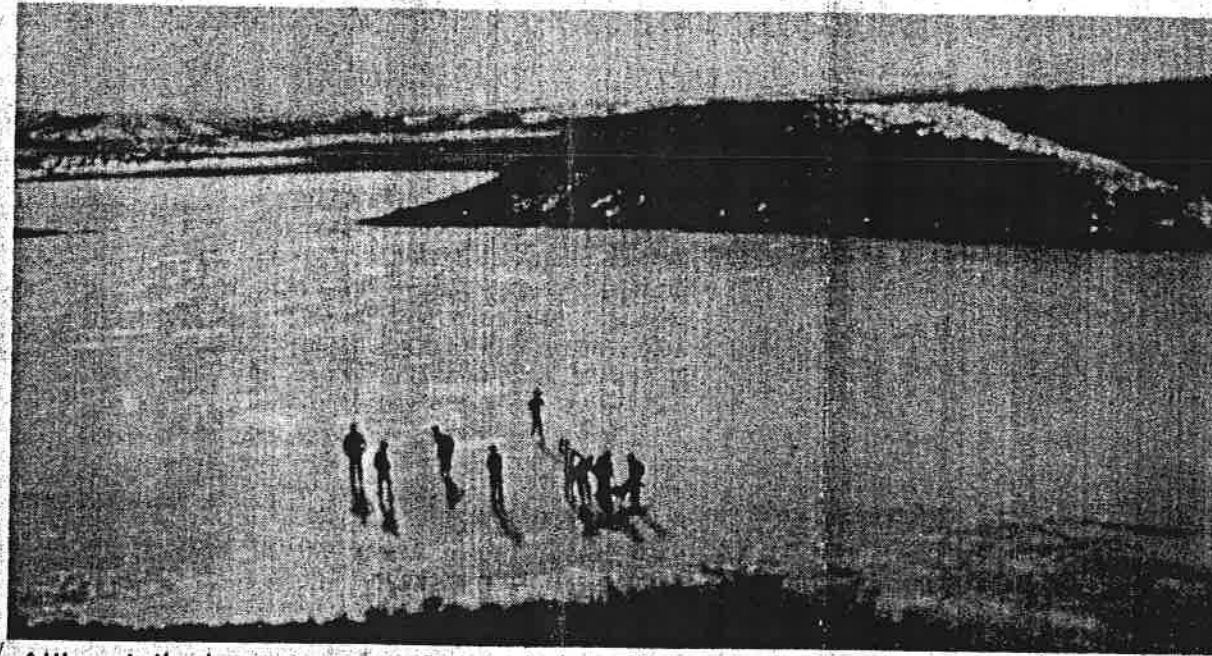
In 1885 Sam Wells moved to the future site of Desert Lake and began working almost immediately on a dam to hold back spring runoff and water from the Huntington Ditch which was being constructed at the same time.

His brother, Tom, Hans and Lars Marsing, Charlie Winder, John Thayne and W.J. Powell joined in the dam-building project and soon had a fairly good sized impoundment backed up.

Families came and lived mostly out of covered wagons that first year. Sam Wells left in August of 1886 and returned again in '88. By now there were three log homes and a dugout built below the dam and on the south end. There were about 25 to 30 people living there.

Samuel Wells was named presiding elder for the LDS people in the town in 1889. Six years later he was responsible for the building of a small school house which also served for church meetings and Sunday school.

In 1896 the hand-built dam washed out in an August rain-storm and caused considerable



Although the towns are gone, Desert Lake is still there. One form of winter entertainment for children who lived in Desert Lake (the town) was ice skating on

Desert Lake (the lake). Little remains of Desert Lake and Victor. Our thanks to Shirley Fauseff for the loan of this old photo of a skating party many years ago.

damage to the few log homes below. But the LDS church helped with the finances and manpower and during the winter a new dam was built, even better and higher than before.

By the fall of 1897 there were about 15 families in the little townsite, most of them living in log or frame homes on the site just southeast of the dam. John Peterson taught school the year before and when school started in the fall of 1897, Vivian Douglas took over the teaching duties.

Very little farming was done in that first decade. Most families raised just enough to keep themselves in food while they continued to work on irrigation ditches and add to the dam.

But in 1897 grain crops were

harvested and a threshing bee was held. The town was seeing cottonwood trees grow and they were now offering some shade to the desert town.

The biggest year of growth came in 1898. A two-room school was erected which housed 45 students and in February a new post office went into service with Elvira Marsing as the first postmistress.

The post office was established in the general store owned and operated by Charles Winder, but already trouble was beginning.

As the town grew, so did the lake and as the water level raised, it forced ground water through some shale and large deposits of alkali began to form. Soon the farm land deteriorated to the point where it was nearly impossible to grow crops.

As the town began to dwindle, people moved northeast to a new site about five miles away. Ditches brought water to the new town which became known as Victor.

Here many of the homes were adobe, although a few of the log homes were dismantled at Desert Lake and moved. Also a few frame homes were built.

east of Elmo and below the hill to the south.

A log home at Victor sits north of the school about 500 yards and a large cement building is just west of the old school house. Old fences and a cistern can still be seen in front of the school.

Desert Lake has even less to remind one of the town. There is a marker on the south shore of the lake where some of the later homes stood, but the original townsite was further east.

Travel on past the marker and follow the road over and down the hill to just in front of the dam on its south end. There is a dirt

road going to the east which goes back around the hill to the south. One old dugout home is still there and dead fruit trees and fences show old evidence of life now gone.

A few bricks and foundations are all that remain of Desert Lake.

Today near the dam about all one can hear is water still running through sluice gates on its way to the east and the alfalfa fields. East of the dam about five miles sits the skeleton of Victor — silent in this desert land.

In 1912, with Desert Lake almost totally deserted, a new post office was designated by the United States postal service and the new town was officially named Victor. Vernon Johnson was appointed as the new postmaster.

There was a brief period of perhaps a year or two when both towns had their own post offices, but only one church served the two communities.

Two years after the post office was established at Victor, the school district formed the Desert Lake School District #3.

A large school house at Victor was built in 1910. The building was made of sun-baked clay bricks, adobe bricks and some cement block. In recent years the roof has fallen straight down on those crumbling walls.

In 1920 most everyone had left even Victor and by the close of the decade the only people there were in the cemetery.

The natural place for the cemetery was between the two towns. Today it is about all that remains of them. There are some stones, wooden grave markers and four wooden crosses marking graves in the old cemetery just six miles due

# Emery County's historic Desert Lake to reclaim glory as bird refuge

By ELIZABETH HANSON

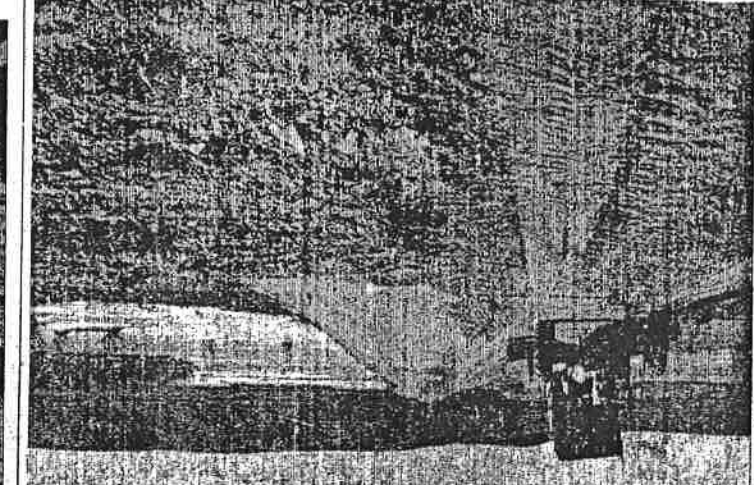
five cattle guards installed and some fencing done.

Historic Desert Lake in Emery County, once a mecca for hunting, skating and social functions, is being developed into a habitat for wild waterfowl, primarily, but at the same time encouraging the pheasant and other upland game. John Nagel, Utah State Fish and Game waterfowl supervisor, who with other officials, inspected progress this week, noted that the alkalali problem will flow from Cleveland canal.

The desert oasis will become a natural basin between the hills, while Desert Lake has always attracted bird life, the number has declined owing in part to lack of food. James L. Oviatt, 82, now living in Salt Lake, fondly recalls seeking entertainment at Desert Lake when he lived in Cleveland. "I first remember Desert Lake in 1905 when I was about 15 and going there every week or so for dancing, skating and hunting under Evan Dastrup is concluding a \$100,000 contract involving the shifting of 100,000 square yards of earth into five dikes sheltering six ponds. One pond will be set apart as a rest pond always off-limits to hunters. Mr. Nagel observed that the ducks and geese soon learn the whereabouts of the haven and take advantage of all accommodations judging from other similar spots in the state. Two water control structures installed at each dike will regulate the water levels of the ponds. The second old dam has been rebuilt.

Grains will be planted on abandoned farm lands and left standing. Trees and other types of flora will be planted about the marshy terrain. The object is to make the swamps swamper to stimulate the necessary plant and insect life needed for bird support. 1710 acres of private ground were acquired by the federal government and turned over to the state. While Desert Lake has always been given the right to manage the lands, but the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife purchases weeks. Great sport for us. In the

fall and again back in the spring, they located by the thousands in the lands, but the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife purchases weeks. Great sport for us. In the



Grader puts finishing touches to one of dikes at Desert Lake bird refuge developed by the Utah Fish and Game Department.

Thyane, Davis names are prominent in Desert Lake history. When the dreaded catastrophe did occur nearly drowning a part of the population, the people were staked with the reservoir water. Shade and fruit trees flourished. Grapes and strawberries were harvested besides the usual farm thousand dollars, a magnificent sum in those days, to build another dam, by then, according to able farmers, who built a school-house for academic, pleasurable count for Emery County History, so many Cleveland farms had gone swampy and the water drained into the reservoir was pumped the pedals of the player piano.

Worries over the dam must to injure crops and swamp the stock. Eventually the alkali began to move six miles to the north to a new site called Victor. One of the last families out was the Bill Pillings. Bill said he was tired of hauling four miles to get a drink of fresh water and that he had hauled culinary water for 40 years.

Victor Windler, Elmo, testifies that ice chunks large as cabins to tear away roads, threaten lives, homes, a natural basin between the hills, Below lay the farmlands awaiting attracted bird life, the number has declined owing in part to lack of food. James L. Oviatt, 82, now living in Salt Lake, fondly recalls seeking entertainment at Desert Lake when he lived in Cleveland. "I first remember Desert Lake in 1905 when I was about 15 and going there every week or so for dancing, skating and hunting under Evan Dastrup is concluding a \$100,000 contract involving the shifting of 100,000 square yards of earth into five dikes sheltering six ponds. One pond will be set apart as a rest pond always off-limits to hunters. Mr. Nagel observed that the ducks and geese soon learn the whereabouts of the haven and take advantage of all accommodations judging from other similar spots in the state. Two water control structures installed at each dike will regulate the water levels of the ponds. The second old dam has been rebuilt.

Engineers laid out the topography and drew blueprints before construction began. Mr. Nagel explained that as part of the Lower Colorado River Storage plan, the Fish and Game has been given the right to manage the lands, but the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife purchases weeks. Great sport for us. In the



Looking over construction progress at Desert Lake waterfowl refuge area, left to right, Darrel Nish, upland bird director, and John Nagel, waterfowl director, Utah Fish and Game Department, Salt Lake City; Joe Jeffs, regional game manager, and Lloyd Stevens, regional supervisor.

detached the early settlers. Near all the farms had been mortgage pay for the dam and other in improvements. The bank foreclose on the mortgages when the farmers were unable to meet payments. Viri feels that in this day and age the government would come to the rescue, but then farmers had no alternative and the story of their sorry exodus is history. Today little physical evidence remains of either Desert Lake town or of Victor. Poignant memories writh about the patches cemetery near the lake and the one fenced with cedar posts and barbed wire between the two old settlements.

**New Wellington Article Series Features Residents Who Have Lived Over 80 Years**

(Editor's note: Having completed the series of articles telling of persons in Wellington town who are responsible for the government of that community, a new series begins this week telling of other interesting Wellington personalities. The series is entitled the "Over Eighty Group).  
**ELLEN WINDER SNOW**  
 From ox-cart to travel by modern airplane was the story told by Mrs. Ellen Pilling Winder Snow when she was interviewed recently for her life's story.



**ELLEN WINDER SNOW**

"I was born in a one roomed combination dirt and board floor 1876, in Pillingers Millard county, Utah," Mrs. Snow answered to the first query. "My father, John Pilling, died when I was three years old and my mother moved with her three children to Kanosh to work for a widower, Niels L. Marsing, who had five boys. One of these boys was Martin Marsing, father of the Marsing Brothers, who operate cattle and sheep interests in Carbon county and who live on their ranch in Miller Creek," Mrs. Snow continued.

"Incidentally, mother later married Mr. Marsing," Mrs. Marsing replied almost as an afterthought. "One of my earliest recollections," continued Mrs. Snow, "was of the time our house caught fire

and almost everything we had household use and so she and her neighbors brought us new clothes and other things we needed and at the time I wondered why mother felt so badly about this."  
 Mrs. Snow told of her early schooling and experiences with the Indians and how she learned to plant the wheat fields, working all summer barefooted when she was but 13 years old to gather 22 bushels of grain which she sold to buy herself enough denim to make a new dress.  
 "The summer I was 14," Mrs. Snow said, "mother and I went back to Pilling to dry fruit and while there I gathered some seeds from a locust tree near my birthplace, and several years later I planted these very seeds, which I had guarded all the time, by my home in Desert Lake. And to this day there are many big, beautiful locust trees growing around my old home over there."  
 When she and her first husband (Charles H. Winder) moved to Desert Lake they traveled in covered wagons, driving horses, cows, pigs and sheep, and the boys cut off the tops of their boots to make moccasins for the pigs to wear. "We crossed the Salina mountains," she said, "in very cold and miserable weather. We had to shovel snow away to make our beds on the ground. We propped up the wagon tongue and made our beds under that with a canvas thrown over the tongue to form a sort of tent."  
 When the Winder family lived in Desert Lake there was no ward organization there and they drove to Cleveland, five miles away, to attend church. "Sometimes I went with Viola Wells, she driving an ox team," she said. After they got water for the farms in that valley there were, for a time, 30 families living in Desert Lake. They had Sunday school, sacramental meetings, Primary.

Mrs. Snow told of her early water, for the return trip. "In those early days," said Mrs. Snow, "I learned to make artificial flowers from an old Danish lady, Grandma Rhodes. Flower making has been a great help to me and my family. I would make flowers all winter long and be prepared for Memorial Day in May. We used to go with team and covered wagon for one week in the valley, and I'd exchange my flowers for anything I could use in my home. Then I would go home, re-load and go to the mining camps for about ten days to two weeks. I went in a covered wagon every year for 26 years and then four years in a car before I moved over here to Wellington. For over ten years after coming here I put my flowers in stores all over Carbon and Emery counties. I have also made and sold many quilts and braided rugs. In 1903 I made 64 quilts and sold them in Sunnyside, and after her husband died Mrs. Snow stayed in Desert Lake for six years, moving to Wellington in 1933. She married Mason L. Snow in 1934. He died in 1944 and she has lived here alone since then. She still owns her old home in Desert Lake, and at the present time a grandson and his family are living there."  
 "Aunt Ellen", as she is affectionately called by many of the local people, will be 83 years old next November, and she hasn't a gray hair, nor does she need glasses for reading or working. She is the mother of 10 children, eight of whom are still living. She can count 75 grandchildren and 110 great-grandchildren and one great-great grandchild.

The water there was not fit for household use and so she and her neighbors used to drive twelve miles to haul what they needed. They would do their washing at the river and then fill every available vessel which would hold water, for the return trip. "In those early days," said Mrs. Snow, "I learned to make artificial flowers from an old Danish lady, Grandma Rhodes. Flower making has been a great help to me and my family. I would make flowers all winter long and be prepared for Memorial Day in May. We used to go with team and covered wagon for one week in the valley, and I'd exchange my flowers for anything I could use in my home. Then I would go home, re-load and go to the mining camps for about ten days to two weeks. I went in a covered wagon every year for 26 years and then four years in a car before I moved over here to Wellington. For over ten years after coming here I put my flowers in stores all over Carbon and Emery counties. I have also made and sold many quilts and braided rugs. In 1903 I made 64 quilts and sold them in Sunnyside, and after her husband died Mrs. Snow stayed in Desert Lake for six years, moving to Wellington in 1933. She married Mason L. Snow in 1934. He died in 1944 and she has lived here alone since then. She still owns her old home in Desert Lake, and at the present time a grandson and his family are living there."  
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Relief society and mutual. She was Sunday school teacher, secretary of the mutual and Primary president, and she usually did the school and church janitor work as well as taking care of the school teachers. She boarded 22 teachers during her years in Desert Lake, and said that she always found the men easier to please than the ladies.  
 Her story continues: "During the years I lived there the dam on the Desert lake broke twice, first in 1896 when the water took all our crops and came right into our dooryards. I was afraid I would never get any more fish so I went down in front of my house where the fish from the lake were flopping everywhere in the grass, and I picked them up and stacked them in my apron, as many as I would carry. The next time the dam broke I was living in a different house nearer the Price river, and the water took forty hives of my bees and came right into my house. There was a terrible storm and it rained so much that everything in my house was wet. I even had to put my baby in a box under the table to keep him dry from the leaking roof."  
 The water there was not fit for

with, "Since I came to Wellington in an airplane one time when M. Snow and I were in Salt Lake to live I have been able to travel a great deal. I went to Michigan City. I sometimes think it's some what of an accomplishment to turn through Florence, Nebraska, all over this country, to have seen both oceans, and to have traveled in both ox-team drawn vehicle and in airplanes all in one life same trail where my mother, Sarah Bedford Pilling Marsing, traveled pulling a hand cart so many years ago. I have also been to the Northwestern states, Washington, Oregon and into Canada; then I've been in most of the western states, down through Texas to the Gulf of Mexico, and all as far as Monterey, and all over California. I even had a ride

daughter of John & Sarah Bedford Pilling  
 Ellen Pilling Winder Snow