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Over the Mountains and Into the Valley: Oliver Newton Bishop (1857–1940)

By Melvin Carl Bishop (1883-1969)

(Part 2 of 2)

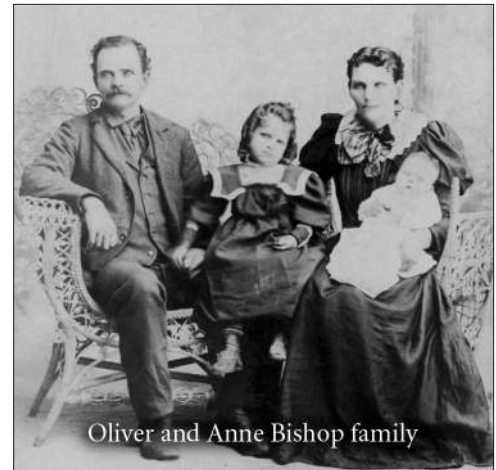
We spent one easy winter at the Meadows. There couldn't have been more than three feet of snow, for we had no trouble breaking a road with team and bobsled to get the sheep down to the canyons for early feed. They took the sheep down in the Sickfoot Canyon, then just before lambing they moved them across the ridge to the Bishop Creek Canyon for the lambing season. We drove the sheep out through the snow in two lines, one in each bobsled track. After the sheep were in the canyon on good feed, my father came home. He had his hatband full of wild flowers such as only those canyons could produce. It was beautiful in the spring with lots of flowers and grass, while at home it was still winter with lots of snow.

No livestock was left at home; cows, horses, and sheep were down in the canyon. My mother proposed the entire family go, too, so another tent was provided, and all necessities in the way of clothing were loaded into the bobsled and into packsaddles and hauled to the rim of the canyon. Here everything was loaded onto the horses. Everybody had to walk but the baby, and down we went to the bottom of what we called Meadow Creek Canyon. (It is now known as Bishop Creek.) Here we enjoyed the beautiful spring sunshine. Everything was green and lovely, and the hillside was full of the happiest little lambs. After a stay of a month we trekked back to the meadows.

About June 1 of 1891, while the sheep were being sheared at the meadows, two men by the name of Daniel Mann and John Phillips came driving up to the shearing pen, inquiring how to get down to the Grande Ronde River. They were looking for homesteads. After getting the desired information they went on their way and located their claims near where we unloaded the bobsled when we went into the canyon. These were the first homestead claims in Promise.

On their return several days later, they camped at a small creek and during the night a large cougar killed the colt and took a full meal from the kill. The two men came on to our place and related the happening. My father was going to sheep camp and would go right by the dead colt; he said he would take some strychnine along and try to get the killer. This he did, and next morning when he came home he had the cougar's hide and head on the packhorse. To this day that little creek carries the name of Cougar Creek.

Late in 1891 my father had a chance to trade the Valley Ranch for 110 head of cattle. With the Meadow Ranch still on his hands, it looked good since they were a fine bunch of cattle. The trade was made, and we started to move back to the Meadow Ranch. The first job was to break a road through the snow to the meadows, then to the canyons of the Grand Ronde. My father took a team hitched to the front bob of a bobsled and, with me mounted on our horse, we struck out for the meadows. It was hard going, but once we got through it was not so bad, since every time the road was traveled it would be better.



Oliver and Anne Bishop family

The rest of the moving was early in the spring of 1893, and all the streams in the valley were high. When we went to cross Whiskey Creek, it was quite high, and just below the ford was a point extending out over a deep hole. There were a lot of little calves that didn't want to go into the water. So we drove the cows across. They would miss their calves and start bawling. Of course, the calves would see their predicament, so they would get just as far out on the point as they could and jump just as far as they could, then swim out. They all went the same way. It took three days to drive a bunch of cattle from the Middle Valley to the canyons of the Grand Ronde.

About April the snow was gone, so the cows with little calves were brought back to the meadow to be milked since we were running a dairy. We usually milked about 30 head. We thought the only way to raise a calf was to let it suck its mother. So we let the calf take part of the milk, then we would take the rest after the calf was taken away. We had pasture for the calves and a pen adjoining the cow corral where we milked.

We had no separator then. We had never heard of such a thing. The milk was carried to the milk house in five-gallon cans, strained and put into pans of about one gallon each, and placed on a rack that took all the space on one side of the milk house. Every day the pans from the day before had to be taken down and the cream skimmed off. Every other day it had to go into a barrel churn, which was operated by a boy. After churning, it had to go through a butter worker to get all the buttermilk out. It was then molded into two-pound rolls and packed in kegs about 100 pounds each, covered with strong brine, and put in a good cool place up on the hillside at the head of the spring. The cold water kept the butter in good shape until the dairy season was over and the cows were all dry. Then the butter was loaded into a wagon and taken to market, usually La Grande or Baker City, and traded for clothing or what was needed in the home.

It was hard to get money. I remember my father said he got 22 cents per pound of butter in trade, which he thought was pretty good. This routine went on until the fall of 1893, known as the wet season. All grain crops in the Northwest suffered terribly from a continual rain that started in September, and almost every week after that there would be a day or two of rain. Grain that was stacked or in the shock started sprouting. Our crop at the meadows was hay in the stack. My father told one man that he was ashamed to look at stacks so badly damaged. When it stopped raining, it started snowing, just as hard as it had rained.



Around December 1 of that year, we set out for Lower Valley to visit our aunt and uncle. The road was still open. My father stayed home to feed the stock, and the family took the team and bobsled to make the trip. At first, all went fine, until we got a little more than halfway, where we had to cross a creek. The people in the valley had been getting out wood and were dragging logs across the creek. It had worn the track on the lower side down, making it very slick. We turned over, spilling into the water and snow. The horses got loose. I ran after the team and sled, caught the sled, tipped it back, got in, went to the front, reached down, picked up the lines that were dragging, and stopped the team. Soon we were all loaded up and on our way again.

We were there overnight, then started back about noon Sunday. By the time we got about halfway (six miles) it was dark and snowing hard. The fresh snow was sliding in front of the sled and making it pull hard. The horses were showing signs of fatigue. All at once a dark figure appeared not very far ahead of us. We heard a familiar shout. It was my father on another horse. He tried to help with the other horse, but after a little more hard traveling the sled was abandoned. It was about nine or ten o'clock when we got home. We were very glad to be there.

My father went to the valley to see a man who had quite a lot of oats that had been rain-damaged at harvest time. In desperation he bought it all. He started moving it on pack horses, four 100 pound sacks to the horse. With his three horses he could bring in 1,200 pounds a trip. The trip was 14 miles each way. He would load the horses and then he would walk and lead them. When he hit the deep snow with a single trail, he would walk behind them. He usually got home about 10 or 11 at night, then would get up and go again in the morning.

About this time, two valley men had been down on the Grande Ronde River and came out on skis. They said the canyon sides were beginning to show bare spots, but it was about 12 miles to the river, and there was no road whatever through the deep snow.

So when there were enough oats on hand for a few days, we would take the horses and let one lead-horse flounder through for a while, then we would change lead horses. It was slow and hard on horses, but we finally got our trail broken to the river. Next was to get the cattle through, so we sorted out all the stronger ones and started at daylight. The horses were loaded with grub and bedding, and to make a full load for each horse we—my father, my brother Albert, and I—took all the oats we could. We started with three horses and about 75 head of cattle. One of us was to lead the horses, then one was to drive about 10 head of the most able cattle while the others brought up the rear. By the time the last ones were over the trail, the trail would be getting pretty good, although the cattle all stepped in the same tracks as much as possible.

We kept moving along slowly and got to the mouth of Sick Foot Canyon just a little after dark. That river must have looked pretty bad to a bunch of poor, tired cattle, but it seemed the only thing to do was to get them across. They would go in the water a little way and then try to turn back. But after much crowding, yelling, and thrashing with a bush in our hands, the crossing was finally made. They all lay down just as soon as they found a place where they could, and stayed there until morning.

The next day was spent just driving them onto bare spots where they could find something to eat. Even then we had to keep after them as the canyon sides were very rough and rocky, and it seemed they would just as soon lie down and die as to look for something to eat. It became evident that someone would have to stay to keep them moving.

After two days, my father asked us boys if we would stay with them for three days so he could go to the valley and bring another bunch. He left one horse and, for the first time ever, left his rifle with us. He made a mark on a rock at the water's edge so we could tell if the river should rise any. He had shot a deer while he was there, so we had plenty of meat. He took the larger part of it home with him, leaving a hind-quarter for us, which he hung up in a tree at the back end of the tent. He said that after doing our work as best we could for three days, we could go home if the river did not rise. He left one horse with us so we could get across the river. The river didn't rise. and after the three days were up, and we were busy getting our breakfast, we discovered our meat was gone. We never did know what took it, probably a lynx, wildcat, or cougar.

It was a long trek home: first climb out of the canyon, then ride 15 miles home through deep snow with only a single trail. Our horse was almost exhausted, so we took turns riding for a while to help out, but we hadn't traveled far when it started raining. It then turned to wet, heavy snow. We were wet, our clothing was heavy, and we were played out. Just after crossing Cougar Creek. our horse dropped from sheer exhaustion right in the trail. We let her rest a little while and then tried to get her up. By then it was after dark, but we couldn't persuade her to go any farther.

Large wet flakes of snow were beating down on us, and there was six feet of snow underneath. What could two little boys do? Well, I think we cried a little. Finally, after a few minutes, we tried again to persuade our horse to get up, but she refused. It seemed we must leave her and go on by ourselves, so we left the saddle and bridle on, put the bridle reins over the saddle horn, and started on, never expecting to see her alive again. We finally arrived home.

I don't know what time it was. The next morning what should we see out in the yard, but our horse. By this time the hay was all gone, so we emptied the straw tick from the spare bed for her to eat. Soon after, we started getting ready to move to the valley. By this time there were lots of cattle and horses on the river. My father would stay and look after them. The rest of the family stayed in the valley and we children started school.

These times were very trying to our dear mother. Besides caring for her five children and directing us boys in caring for the garden, there was the terrible anxiety for her husband across the river, especially when there was an article in the county newspaper from someone way down the river, stating they had seen floating down the river a horse with a saddle on it that was supposed to belong to my father. The supposition was he had been trying to cross by swimming his horse and had failed to make it. I don't think my mother had given up, although she was terribly worried. She kept praying and hoping.

We lived on a hill overlooking the valley, and at about five in the evening around the middle of June, our dear mother looked down across the valley and called out to us children, "I see someone coming!"

At last my father had come home. Though he was a half-mile away, we ran and met him more than halfway. All anxiety was gone and all were overjoyed. He wore a full beard of black, his hair was quite long, but he looked good to us. His horses that had been worn out from working in the snow were now so fat and pretty.

* * *

Wallowa's First Doctors

Dr. G.W. Gregg (1865-1946)
Practiced in Wallowa: 1897-1909

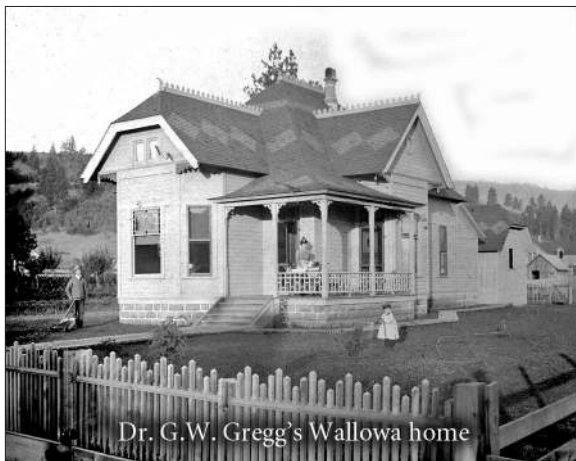
Dr. G.W. Gregg, mayor of Wallowa and for 11 years a practitioner of medicine in this city, left Tuesday morning for Ashland, Oregon, Turlock, California, and later to London, Ohio. He will be away for two months or more.

While in Ashland and Turlock he will look over the chances for a good location in a lower altitude, which is it hoped with benefit his daughter's, Myriam's, health. He will join his family in London, and they will return with him.

– *The Wallowa Sun*, June 25, 1909

Dr. G.W. Gregg, for 11 years a practicing physician of this city and now the city's mayor, has decided to locate in Ashland, and will resign as mayor and close up his affairs here within the next few weeks.

– *Morning Oregonian*, July 28, 1909



Edwin Marvin has received a letter from Dr. G.W. Gregg stating that he has decided to locate in Ashland, Oregon. He will return here from his visit in Ohio and then proceed to Ashland. Dr. Gregg has practiced medicine here for 11 years, during which time he has won a host of friends both by his ability as a physician and his sterling qualities as a man. Ever foremost in every movement for the good of the community and of its citizens individually, he will be greatly missed from our midst and not one but will regret to know he is going. But we congratulate Ashland upon securing such an estimable family, and congratulate the doctor upon securing such an excellent field since he has decided to leave us.

– *The News Record*, August 4, 1909

Dr. Verdo B. Gregory (1869-1933)
Practiced in Wallowa: c. 1909-1911

Dr. Verdo B. Gregory practiced in Alabama until the Spanish-American War. During that period he joined the U.S. Army, served in the Medical Corps, and saw action in the Philippines. After the war, he stayed in the army and served with the Yellow Fever Mission in the Panama Canal Zone.

Upon leaving the army, he came to Wallowa and started practice, being joined in partnership by his nephew, Dr. John B. Gregory in 1909. In 1911, Dr. Verdo Gregory moved to Roswell, New Mexico, where he practiced medicine and ranched.

In 1912 he returned to Wallowa County and opened an office and hospital in the building that now houses the Wallowa County Museum in Joseph. He was again joined by his nephew, Dr. John B. Gregory, who remained and maintained a hospital and an office in Wallowa. Some time later, Dr. Gregory closed his practice in Joseph and moved to Turlock, California.

– *The History of Wallowa County, Oregon*, 1983



Dr. Verdo B. Gregory, formerly of Joseph, but now located at Hemmet, California, has acquired a hospital at that place. Reports also tell of his marriage to Miss Beulah Working, who was head nurse at the Joseph hospital while Dr. Gregory owned it.

– *Wallowa County Reporter*, March 4, 1920

Sometime [after 1912] Dr. Gregory closed his practice in Joseph and moved to Turlock, California, where he lived and practiced medicine until fatally injured in a hunting accident.

– *The History of Wallowa County, Oregon*, 1983

Dr. Verdo Gregory shot himself in the left foot Tuesday, November 23, while hunting ducks in Southern California. The leg was amputated just below the knee, and last reports the doctor was getting along in good shape.

– *The Wallowa Sun*, December 20, 1920

Dr. Verdo Gregory, 63, said to be the last surviving member of the United States yellow fever commission sent to Brazil, and former Chief Army Surgeon at Manila, Philippine Islands, died here today following a brief illness.

Doctor Gregory, who came here six years ago from Los Angeles, was sent to Brazil prior to the Spanish-American War. He later joined the American army and lost a leg in action in the Philippine Islands campaign. He remained in charge of the army hospital at Manila for several years following cessation of hostilities.

– *Bakersfield Californian*, April 15, 1933

Note that the above articles about Dr. Verdo B. Gregory give two different versions about how he lost his leg, and two about how he died.

Dr. John B. Gregory (1885-1969)

Practiced in Wallowa: 1909-1933

Dr. John B. Gregory is numbered among the younger members of the professional circles of Wallowa, but by close application and unremitting energy he has already won considerable prominence. He is careful and conscientious, making best use of the talents nature has given him, and he now stands among the more capable physicians of the city. His birth occurred in Alabama, on the 1st of December, 1886. In 1903, he entered the Birmingham Medical College, from which he graduated in 1907.

In February 1909, he came to Oregon, locating at Wallowa. At that time his uncle, Dr. V. B. Gregory, was located in this city, and he associated himself with his uncle. In November, 1910, they erected and established the Wallowa Hospital, which is one of the most valuable institutions of the city. In April of the next year Dr. V. B. Gregory left Wallowa and removed to Roswell, New Mexico, where he is now located.

Since his uncle's removal from this city, Dr. John B. Gregory has had full charge of the hospital work and has met with a success which attests his ability and his worth to Wallowa. In the intervening three years since coming to this city, he has built up an extensive practice and is recognized as one of the most able and capable practitioners in Wallowa Valley. His work has already proven of vital importance to the profession and the honor and success he has won are well merited.

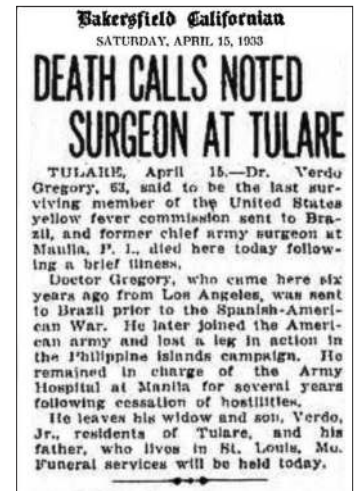
– Joseph Gaston

The Centennial History of Oregon, 1811-1912, Volume III, 1912

Dr. John Gregory established Wallowa's first hospital in 1910, with space for eight patients. Dr. Jack, as he was known, ran his Wallowa hospital until the 1930s, when he left for Hot Lake Sanitarium in Union County. He had taken over the Wallowa practice of his uncle, Dr. Verdo Gregory, who moved up the valley, where he leased the old First Bank Building in Joseph—now the Wallowa County Museum—and ran it as a private hospital for seven years.

– Elane Dickenson

Wallowa County Chieftain, March 15, 2007



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1870s

Pioneer Wagons

The pioneer wagons were not equipped with brakes. The rear wheels were locked, or fastened with a chain. Whenever it was necessary to descend a hill of any consequence, a stout oak piece was securely bound across underneath the wagon bed, and when the pioneer came to a small hill, not steep, only one wheel was chained. This was done by fastening one end of a chain to the oak piece and the other end to the wheel. If the hill was quite steep, both wheels were chained. If the hill was really steep and long, both wheels would be chained with a longer chain to tie around the fellow so that a knot would roll back until it was directly under the wheels. This was known as a “rough lock.”

– Claudia Killough

Bits of Wallowa County Lore, 1971

1894

Wallowa Hill

The Wallowa Hill is reported by freighters and travelers to be almost impassable. This section of road is in Union County, and the county court over there does not seem to care whether or not this road is in a condition fit to travel. Yet as a matter of fact, the people of Grande Ronde Valley should care. If that road is not kept in a condition that makes it safe and pleasant to travel, the trade of this great Wallowa Valley will be transferred the other way. The road to Lewiston will soon be completed and, as it is about the same distance to that point, a great majority of the trade that now goes to Elgin and La Grande will go over the newer and better route. For these reasons, Grande Ronde trading points should see that the Wallowa road to the bridge [at Minam] is kept in a proper condition.

– *The Aurora*, September 21, 1894