

JOHN SHAWCROFT
and
The Trek To The San Luis Valley

John was the eldest child of Ann Hunt and William Shawcroft. He looked after them and provided for them. William did what he could - even sitting on the ground and chopping wood, but he was not able to do much. John did a lot of freighting after he bought the ox team. One time during the winter months, he turned his oxen out to pasture, and when he went to find them they were gone. He almost wore out his boots looking for them, when he finally went to a man who was supposed to be a fortune-teller, and asked him for help. The man told him, "Your red ox is lying down right now, but you will never find the other one." He found the red one, just as the man had said, but never found the other one. By thrift and hard work, John was soon able to buy a team of horses. Then he could travel faster. When not busy with his farming, he freighted with his team and wagon as far as Evanston, Wyoming, hauling all kinds of produce, even butter, eggs, cheese, etc. He told how the butter was worked and then put down in salt brine to preserve it. One night, during a freighting journey, his horses strayed away, and while hunting for them he came upon a thick patch of trees and willows, through which he could see a bunch of Indians. The Indians wore war paint, and from what he could tell, they were making plans to go into some town the next day. John fell to his knees and crawled away unseen, thankful that he had seen them in time to be cautious. Later he learned that they had, indeed, gone to one of the nearby towns and caused a lot of trouble.

John Shawcroft had built a home in Fountain Green, and was well established there with his wife and family, when suddenly he received a call from President John Taylor to go to Colorado and help the people there. A large number of Saints had come to Colorado from the Southern States, and they were not familiar with the methods of irrigation as used by the Utah farmers. From the earliest settlement of Fountain Green, canals and ditches had been dug to bring water to the farms for irrigation. It was a practice of the President of the Church to call people to colonize in various places

throughout the west, but John had been promised by his Bishop that, because he was taking care of an invalid father, as well as his own family, he would not be called. John reminded the Bishop of this promise, but the Bishop said, "It was not I who called you - you were called by the President of the Church." They had heard stories about Colorado - how the wind blew a lot and the winters were very cold. Sick at heart, John left the decision up to his wife, who said, without hesitation, "What can we do? If we have been called by the President of the Church, we'll go!"

So once again, John began making preparations to move to a new place. Once again, he had the task of disposing of his property, obtained by a great deal of hard work. His home and land were purchased by James Collard, husband of Ann Shawcroft's sister, Hannah Hunt. The property sold for much less than it was worth, and John told James Collard that, but all he got was a shrug and the reply, "But you have to sell." A number of other people from Fountain Green and Fairview received the same call that John did, so they all made plans to leave together. Thor N. Peterson, a former resident of Fountain Green, who had gone to Colorado in 1880 wrote back to John and told him that cattle would do well there and he advised John to bring cattle with them. Consequently all of their surplus funds went for the purchase of cattle. Forty head were driven to Colorado of which John owned about twenty-five head. There were ten wagons in the group, which consisted of the John Shawcroft Family, the James Jensen family (James Jensen was a brother of Maria Shawcroft), the Jim Nielson family, James Berthelsen and family, John Guymon (son-in-law of Jim Nielson), Tom and John Morgan, Jim Madsen, who worked for John Shawcroft, and Chris Bogue (James Jensen's brother-in-law) all of Fountain Green. They were joined by the Heber Cornum family of Fairview. John Morgan, one of the Cornum boys, and sometimes young Jimmy Nielson drove the cattle.

It was a sad parting with loved ones and old friends at Fountain Green, but John felt that, as soon as he had completed his work on this mission, he would be able to return again to Fountain Green to live. William and Ann Hunt Shawcroft were now fifty-eight and fifty-four years of age, respectively and Sarah Bardell Hunt was seventy-eight. John and Maria Shawcroft had four small children when they left Fountain Green, John William, Mary

Maralda, James Nathan, and the baby, Joseph Hyrum.

The small wagon train left Fountain Green on July 8, 1882. On the very first day of the journey, in the mountains above Fountain Green en route to Castle Valley, the wagons were going down a fairly steep incline where there was not much of a road and John's wagon tipped over, spilling children, food pans, bedding, and all of the contents of the wagon. There was a great deal of confusion, with children crying, and five-year old Maralda shouting, "Oh - my toe - my little toe." The wagon was soon up-righted and re-packed, not much worse for the wear, except for the fact that Maria Shawcroft remained nervous and afraid during the remainder of the trip. The route traveled was by way of Castle Valley and across the Green River and the Grand River. Those who travel this country by auto now and find it a bleak and desolate country, can sympathize with anyone starting out by wagon to make the trip. There were no bridges over the two large rivers they crossed, and the most dreaded and the most dangerous thing about the entire trip was fording these rivers and getting the cattle safely across. Nathan, just three years old, told in later years of riding in the back of the wagon and seeing the ears of the little mules tied to the back of the wagon sticking out of the water as they bobbed up and down. The place where they crossed the Green River was south, a considerable distance, from where the railroad crosses the river now. They crossed the Grand River below Moab, just before the river goes into the box canyon. Sometimes, when they found a place where the feed and water were good, they would stop for a day or two for the cattle to rest. There were several milk cows in the herd, and these supplied milk and butter. It was a simple matter to churn butter by placing the cream in a container in the early morning, and opening it at noon to find that the jolt of the wagon had churned the butter.

The first place of importance they came to in Colorado was Durango and the children were impressed by the railroad train which they saw there for the first time. From there they went to Pagosa Springs, then to Chama by way of Cumbres Pass (not the present route). From Chama they traveled by way of the Los Pinos Creek to the Big Horn Mountain, and then into the San Luis Valley on the Conejos River above San Rafael. They followed the Conejos River down to Conejos. As they came through "Stringtown" they

saw Mexican settlers cutting badly frozen wheat with sickles and cradles. It was early September and the air was cool. What a discouraging sight it was for John Shawcroft - who then little realized he would live out his remaining days in the big valley now spread out before him.

Traveling through the old Spanish Fort at Guadalupe, and noticing that there was a flour mill at Conejos, the wagon train made its way to Manassa. Having been settled in 1877, Manassa was now quite a thriving community by pioneer standards. They camped there on the Little Conejos River for several days before going on to Richfield, where they would make their home. Of this group only the Cornum family did not remain in Richfield. There were already three families living in Richfield, having come there in 1880 - the Thor Peterson family, the T.A. Crowther family and the Wallace Young family.

The country was very flat and barren - there were no houses or fences and very few trees between Guadalupe and Alamosa. The land was covered with brush and greasewood, and the early frost was evident in the vegetation. In 1880 the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad had been built from Alamosa to Antonito, and about one mile west of Richfield stood a water tank and a section house, used by the railroad. This place was called "The Tank" by the Richfield settlers.

John and his family camped in a tent, just a short distance west of the present Horace Shawcroft home, until their cabin was built. Before any homes were built, however, the town was platted and lots were selected by the various families. As soon as this was accomplished, the men immediately set off for the mountains to the west to get logs for homes. They knew that they had to hurry and get the cabins built before it got too cold. It took three days to get a load of logs. By hard work, cabins were completed for all of the families, and on the last trip to the mountains that fall, logs were brought out with which to construct a meetinghouse. This building was finished in 1883, and was used as a church, amusement hall and school. During the winter months the men spent their time grubbing brush to clear the land for spring planting, herding the cattle - turned out to graze in the open country - making ditches and fencing the lots, the latter all done with poles and posts brought from the mountains. A ditch had been surveyed by Thor N. Peterson with a

spirit level in 1882, which ran from the Conejos River to Richfield. The Spanish settlers said they would never be able to make the water run in it as the land was too flat, but it did run, and that original ditch is still in use.

The Richfield settlers enjoyed themselves even though they had to work hard. They had all learned to work early in life, and found joy in work as well as in play. The people shared what they had. Although each family had its own land, the land was all fenced together and the people all worked together. When the brush and greasewood was cleared from the land it was piled high in big piles and then burned. What excitement this was for the youngsters! A good crop was raised that first year in Richfield. John raised over six hundred bushels of good ripe wheat (an unheard of thing as the wheat in past years had frozen), as well as some oats and feed. The cattle were put down in the "flags" to pasture. Sometimes it was necessary to buy hay from Lafayette Head of Conejos, who owned land to the north of Richfield, but it was poor quality hay.

When Richfield was settled and for several years thereafter, the main source of water was surface wells which were about ten to twenty feet deep. There was one spring a little north of Richfield, but it did not supply sufficient water for all needs. The well water, drawn from the wells with rope and bucket, was strong with alkali and was very hard. This was one of the worst things about Richfield and it caused many of the people to leave, most of them going to Sanford. When it was discovered that artesian wells could be dug, John Shawcroft dug the first well in Richfield. What wonderful memories we have of the old well house at Grandpa's place. How nice it was to go into its damp coolness on a hot day and get a drink of water where the well ran into the water box. And besides that there was always a rich, tangy aroma from the big crocks and pans of milk, cream, buttermilk, clabber and freshly made butter that crowded the water box.

Four children, Lewis Edward, Andrew Franklin, David Earl and Sarah Ann were born while the family still lived in the log house. Ruth Ella and Pearl were born in the new brick house which John Shawcroft built. There was a brick kiln north of Richfield which supplied bricks for all of the brick homes in Richfield.

Early in the year of 1884 more families came from Fountain Green to

Richfield. Among them were the families of John Shawcroft's brother, Frederick, and his sisters, Ruth Coombs and Harriet Guymon. Their parents were now left alone in Fountain Green, but plans were made to bring them to Colorado as soon as possible. These plans were almost complete when word was received from Utah that William had passed away on Sept. 24, 1884 at the age of sixty. John was down in the field working in the hay, so one of the boys was sent to tell him the sad news. John, upon hearing of his father's death, sat down and wept for the one with whom he had been through so much. William was buried in the Fountain Green cemetery. As soon as possible, Ann Hunt Shawcroft came to Richfield to make her home. A small home was built for her just north of John's home, where she lived as long as she was able, with some of the children often staying with her at night. When she grew too old to stay alone, she moved in with John and his family. She died in 1908 and is buried in the Sanford cemetery.

There were always a lot of people at John and Maria Shawcroft's home. Besides their own family, there were always a lot of visitors, and always good food and plenty of it for all. When Heber J. Grant came to Richfield to organize the Richfield Branch of the Manassa Ward, he stayed with John and Maria Shawcroft. Many other high-ranking representatives of the church stayed at their home. There were many specially prepared Sunday dinners for friends and family following Sacrament meeting. Maria often entertained ladies for all day "quiltings", and a big dinner was served to them, and they also had a late afternoon lunch before they left for home.

The family was a sociable one, and even after all of the children were married, they liked to come home for family gatherings. They enjoyed singing the old songs that had been favorites of William and Ann Shawcroft back in England. It was unusual to go into the pantry and not see six or eight pies and two or three cakes prepared for special visitors, or just the family or for anyone who might just drop in. When Maralda's (Raldy) husband died, she and her children returned to her parents home to live. Frank's wife, Mary, died leaving four small children, and John and Maria took the baby Horace, and raised him. It was a very familiar sight to see John holding Horace on his knee.

John Shawcroft, being unable to read or write, never held any office in

the Church except that of a Ward Teacher. He supported the Church in everything - by his contributions, his faithful attendance at meetings, his participation in all of the Church projects and undertakings, and his teaching his own family and encouraging them to remain faithful and true to the Church. He would be pleased, indeed, if he could know of the large number of his children and grandchildren, great grandchildren and now great, great, grandchildren who have filled missions for the Church. Many of them have served in stake presidencies, as bishops and bishops counselors, in High Councils and in many other offices in the Church.

The town of La Jara was settled in 1884 around "The Tank" one mile west of Richfield. Prior to this the Shawcrofts had to drive by wagon to Alamosa to do their trading. This took a whole day. They got their flour from the mill at Conejos. After La Jara was settled there were a number of stores there, so their trips to Alamosa were less frequent. John watched La Jara grow from just a water tank to quite a sizeable community. He joined in the civic affairs of La Jara, and had many friends in the new community who regarded him highly. He was patriotic and learned to write the word "Republican" so he could vote in the elections, as it was then necessary for one to write down his party. It is doubtful if he was ever naturalized. Like most emigrants of the day, he became a citizen by taking up land and becoming settled. Many of the early settlers did not even know that it was necessary to become naturalized.

John had one hobby that he enjoyed very much - that was fishing! Whenever he got a little time and as he grew older, he and Brother Knight went off up the river to fish. On one of these trips, they were camped in a lane, and John was impressed to move the horses. Immediately afterward, a large tree fell where the horses had stood. He liked to go up to the cow camp, where the cattle were pastured in the summer. He loved the land - the growing crops, the new-mown "lucerne", the ripened grain ready for threshing, the cattle grazing in the grassy pastures. He always raised a big vegetable garden and had an apple tree that the children loved to play under. The children also loved the old stairway in the house that was entered through a door and had circular half steps, the little figurines that graced the living room walls, the old pump organ, but mostly the large kitchen, always

smelling of freshly baked bread, with the couch in the corner by the sewing machine where one could rest.

The one sorrow in the lives of John and Maria Shawcroft was that Pearl was not a normal child. They tried to rear her in a normal manner and lavished love and affection on her. She was patiently taught all the things she was able to learn, and was always neat, clean and well-dressed. She was very much a part of the family and was a loveable She particularly loved all of the little children and made a fuss over them. She had her own horse, Dolly, and buggy (later her own car) and she would take her mother to visit Ella at Sanford, or to Aunt Bess and Uncle Nath west of La Jara or Uncle John and Aunt Dora north of La Jara, or some of their other friends. It was always a worry to them that they would have to leave Pearl, and that she might not be cared for and loved as they cared for and loved her. But they need not have worried, as she was well taken care of until her death in 1945 by Aunt Raldy and later by Aunt Sarah.

Ann Shawcroft died in Richfield at the home of her son, John, in 1908 at the age of eighty. This sprightly little old lady was much loved in the Richfield community. The children remember how she would reprimand them by tapping with her cane saying, "I'll catch you when you go to roost!" She was very specific in her likes and dislikes. She always said, "Don't bury me in a coffin with a hard bottom and don't bury me in Sanford". Her first request was granted as Maria Shawcroft, with the help of her son, John, tore off the covering from the bottom of her coffin and carefully padded it with layers of soft cotton, neatly re-covering it, so that her frail body would have a soft place to rest. The esteem in which she was held was in evidence at her funeral, as all of the ladies of Richfield brought their lace curtains from home and hung them up in the meetinghouse at her funeral. Her children, grand children and even some of her great grandchildren have fond memories of her noble and courageous spirit. John Shawcroft tried several times to get in touch with some of his relatives in England, but he never received any replies to his letters. This was a great disappointment to him.

In August, John and Maria, along with Brother Knight and Uncle Nathan's family went up to the cow camp to spend a few days. On the way home, John and Brother Knight stopped at the La Jara Reservoir to fish, so

they and Maria went that way while Nathan and his family started home the other way. Nathan had a strong feeling that he should follow them, and he did. While John was fishing he suffered a heart attack and died immediately. He lacked less than a month of being seventy-five years old. Probably there was no place, other than home, that he would have been happier to die in - the mountains he loved, with the dim memory of the dark coal pits of Denby faded in the past, enjoying himself, fishing and with loved ones, especially his faithful wife Maria, nearby. His brother, his three sisters, and all of his children survived him, and he was sadly missed by all of them. He had been Patriarch to his family for many years, and was honored and revered as such. Perhaps, if he had had one last wish, he would have asked that his family remain faithful and true to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, like that patriarch of old, Joshua who said, "Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth. . .choose you this day whom ye will serve . . .but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

*Let us now praise famous men and our fathers that begat us . . .
There be of them that have left a name behind them, that their praises might be reported.
And some there be which have no memorial; who are perished as though they had never been;
And are become as though they had never been born; and their children after them.
But these were merciful men, whose righteousness hath not been forgotten.
With their seed shall continually remain a good inheritance,
And their children are within the covenant.
Their seed standeth fast, and their children for their sakes.
Their seed shall remain forever, and their glory shall not be blotted out.
Their bodies are buried in peace; but their name liveth forever.*

*Ecclesiasticus, XLIV
(Copied from Page Ix The Lives and Times of Our English Ancestors by Frank Smith)*