

1889-1929

Afton, Uinta, Wyoming

Summer, 1888: Ham's Fork

Phineas, hounded by U.S. Marshals for polygamy, began to look for a safe place to live. At that time there were well-known routes from Bear Lake to Wyoming, and Phineas took Johanna and the children to Ham's Fork in Wyoming to start a dairy farm. The Ham's Fork River runs from the mountains north of Kemerer south and east to I-80 at approximately the location of Little America, not far from where the Oregon/Mormon Trail crosses it and moves westward. It is dry sagebrush country, and at 69 years of age, Phineas found he wasn't up to the rigors of pioneering in such a wild place.

“To escape further harassment by US Marshals, we moved from Logan to Hams Fork where we lived in a tent and bowery. There were more than a 1000 head of range cattle said to be the property of Reel and Rosendale, ranging in the valley almost wild as the deer and elk in the hills. Great pole corrals were built at various places, and we appropriated the use of one of them, near where we made camp. Father intended to take up the land there and make a dairy ranch home.,,Then Father became too ill to stay there and he had to give up making a dairy ranch there...”¹

The family moved back to Logan where they spent the winter and made a plan to move back to a more favorable location in Wyoming.

October, 1889 – Star Valley

The fall of 1889 Phineas moved his family from Logan to a one-room dirt-roof cabin in Star Valley, Wyoming. Part of the incentive came, no doubt, from his son-in-law Byron Allred who had already settled there. The Crow Creek Road from Montpelier, Idaho ran straight to Star Valley and became a natural corridor for summer pasture for cattle from the Bear Lake Valley, some of which went as far as Star Valley.² It also became a path for families escaping persecution in Utah.

The *Deseret News* published glowing articles about Star Valley. From the pulpit in Logan Apostle Moses Thatcher urged beleaguered polygamist families to move there.³ Star Valley became part of the LDS Bear Lake Stake.⁴ Hundreds of families used that road to find a new home in Star Valley.⁵ The road has been replaced by US 89, and is fifty miles from Montpelier to Star Valley.

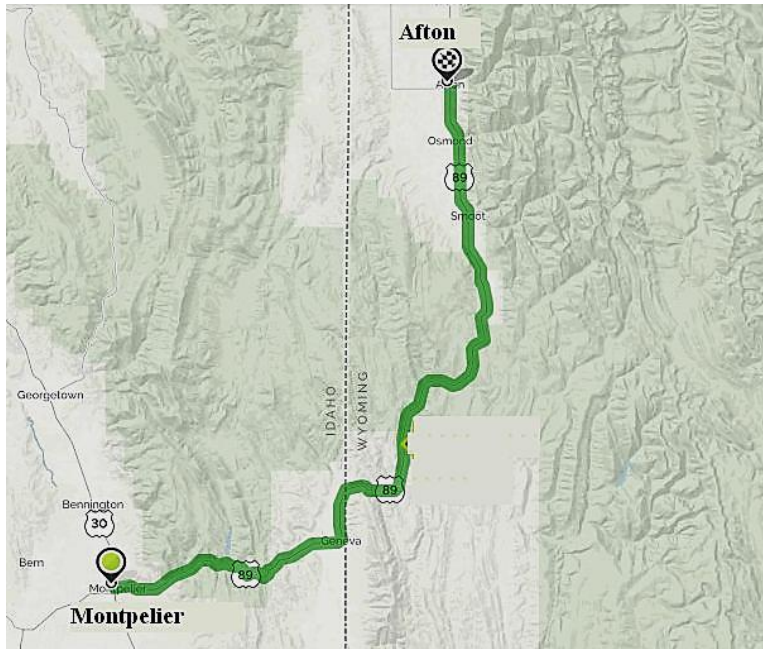
¹ Life Story of Carl and Ella Cook, compiled by Josinette Cook Whiting, Salt Lake City: 1981, p. 14.

² Bessie Beachler, “Some Incidents in Star Valley History,” *Star Valley and its Communities*, Family History Library book 978.782 H2s, p. 2.

³ Lenore S. Fluckiger, “History of Bedford and Turnerville,” *Star Valley and its Communities*, Family History Library book 978.782 H2s, p. 75.

⁴ “Star Valley Stake Record,” (Ms, 1863, filed chronologically,) 1879.

⁵ J. Patrick Wilde, “Treasured Tidbits of Time,” Montpelier, Idaho, Family History Library book 979.644/H2w, 98.



Montpelier, Idaho to Afton, Wyoming, 50 miles on Crow Creek Road, now US 89

“More than any other single event, the Edmunds Anti-Polygamy Act of 1882 accelerated the migration of Mormon families to Star Valley. The Wyoming government was friendly and invited the Later-day Saints to settle. Those who came to the valley with their families were stable citizens and effective colonizers. Wyoming, a young sparsely populated territory, aspired to become a state and was anxious to expand its population. Federal authorities who attempted to enforce the polygamy law received little cooperation.”⁶

Eva Covey Madsen said: “Uncle Carl tells us in his history that Star Valley proved to be a haven for the persecuted

polygamous families who came there. The state governor and other officials were friendly and encouraged the Mormons to live in Wyoming. The people were perhaps as happy and prosperous as many other people, but they had much poverty and few social advantages. It was because of polygamy that grandfather and many others fled to Star Valley.”

“In Uncle Moses' history, he says, ‘Father sold our home in Logan for \$1,000. He bought a new wagon, a bore-machine, for making a leaning fence for he wished to go into farming business and raise livestock.’

“Uncle Carl has written, "Our first home in Afton was a one-room log house with dirt roof and earth floor. We got a load of shingle sawdust, excelsior, to put on the ground for carpet pad and mother's rag carpet on top of that. Some of our stuff was stored in the wagon box and some in a tent. We lived in this place only a month or two...”⁷

Winter, 1889-1890

Afton was surveyed in 1885 so land purchases could take place. Shortly afterward Byron and Phebe (Cook) Allred moved there. Eva Covey Madsen said: “(After) a month or two, they moved to the house vacated by Byron Allred, at the location now occupied by the house of Dr. Worthen, in Lot 4, Block 17 in Afton." This is the house where they lived permanently and in the

⁶ Allie Hyde, Bonnie Nebeker, Erma Anderson, Lavina Leavitt, Maud Ranzenberg, “The Early Years,” *Star Valley and its Communities*, Family History Library book 978.782 H2s, p. 2.

⁷ Eva Covey Madsen, “The Star Valley Period,” published in *The Life and History of Phineas Wolcott Cook*, Appendix.

beginning it was very much like the first one. It was a small two-room cabin which also had a sod roof and a dirt floor. Grandfather and grandmother and their baby, Hilma and her baby and five little children were all crowded into that one little cabin. It was very small for so many but later on it was enlarged and improved.

“Carl said, ‘We had about 40 cows and some 200 young cattle. Most of the cattle starved and froze to death that winter, furnishing us the way to poverty. That was the winter of 1889-90.’”⁸

Eva Covey Madsen “Uncle Carl said that there were only eight cows left the spring of 1890 out of all their cattle brought to the valley. Grandfather traded seven of them for two city lots in Afton and he kept one cow so the family could have milk. With the land which he bought from Byron Allred, on which their cabin stood, he now had three lots to work and plant to crops. Uncle Mose tells us these lots were two and one-half acres each.”⁹

Cold Winters in Afton, Wyoming

The elevation of Afton is just over 6,000 feet. In Garden City it had been just under 6,000 feet, but the new settlers were not prepared for winter. Most of the cattle in the valley starved as a result of the winter of 1889-90. Snow was up to the rooftops and the cattle couldn't get to the meadow grass. Phineas W. Cook was 70 years old. He never recovered financially. The settlers who stayed were strong people who made the best of hard times. By 1893 the Star Valley people were being urged at Stake Conference to adopt “a different mode of farming than had been followed heretofore.” They were told that raising grain, vegetable and fruit crops would not succeed, and to focus on the raising of cattle and sheep.¹⁰

“The early settlers took seriously the promise of a divine tempering of the climate. In 1891, Ole Jensen raised twenty bushels of wheat, one hundred of potatoes, and a nice garden. This was possible, he felt, because “when the crops were growing, myself, two wives and children went out into the fields every Sunday and kneeled down and asked God to spare our crops from frost, so that we could prosper in the land.” But, despite his early success, he had to report in 1900, “We do not try to raise much wheat as it generally gets frozen. All kinds of hay can be raised successfully. Some of the farmers raise a few potatoes and oats for their own use. We usually import our flour...”¹¹

⁸ Eva Covey Madsen, “The Star Valley Period,” published in *The Life and History of Phineas Wolcott Cook*, Appendix.

⁹ Eva Covey Madsen, “The Star Valley Period,” published in *The Life and History of Phineas Wolcott Cook*, Appendix.

¹⁰ Dean L. May, “Between Two Cultures: The Mormon Settlement of Star Valley, Wyoming,” Leonard Arrington, Ed, *Journal of Mormon History*, Provo, Utah: Mormon History Association, 1974, Vol. 13 p. 135.

¹¹ Dean L. May, “Between Two Cultures: The Mormon Settlement of Star Valley, Wyoming,” Leonard Arrington, Ed, *Journal of Mormon History*, Provo, Utah: Mormon History Association, 1974, Vol. 13 p. 133.

1892 – PWC Mining claims

In land records of Afton is the following at Twp 32 North, Range 188, West Afton, Uinta, Wyoming, in the name of P.W. Cook, J. W. Cook:

- Mining claim was named the “God Send,” dated July 5, 1892. Discovery shaft was 300 feet. Dimensions 300 feet northeast x 750 Feet southwesterly. Claim about 1 1/2 miles east of the US survey in Township 32, North Range 118.
- Second claim was named “Confidence,” dated July 18, 1892. The dimensions about the same, but the “Confidence” discovery shaft extends to the east line of the “Godsend.”

Sawmill on Swift Creek



Swift Creek flows westward through Swift Creek Canyon and comes into Afton at 2nd Avenue, where it separates into streams. Afton was located on the creek for its accessibility to a water source, and there is now a reservoir in the canyon to stabilize Afton’s water supply. The children were baptized in Swift Creek.¹² About a year after moving to Star Valley, Phineas found an abandoned mill in the canyon, inquired about the owner, and made up his mind to build a sawmill on the waters where Swift Creek separated into separate streams north of town. It was something he had done in almost every place he had lived the past 40 years.

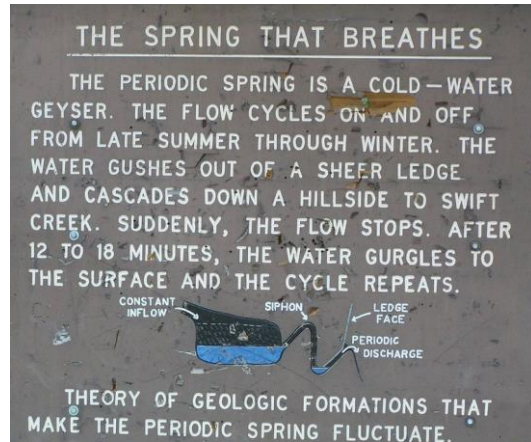
“Notwithstanding his illness at times and his old age all the time, Father still had the heart and energy to work. He secured a little employment at times, mostly from his old friend, Archibald Gardner... (but) there was little opportunity to earn money. So he went to work making a saw mill. He could not buy a modern, up-to-date mill for want of money, so he built one of the old-style, “Up-and-down” saw mills just north of Afton where he located a place where water power could be made available. During the winter he managed to buy some logs which he hewed and framed into the framework of his proposed mill, and he arranged with some of the pioneers to secure the abandoned saw and mill irons from a mill they had built and operated in Swift Creek Canyon.

¹² Eva Covey Madsen, “The Star Valley Period,” published in *The Life and History of Phineas Wolcott Cook*, Appendix.

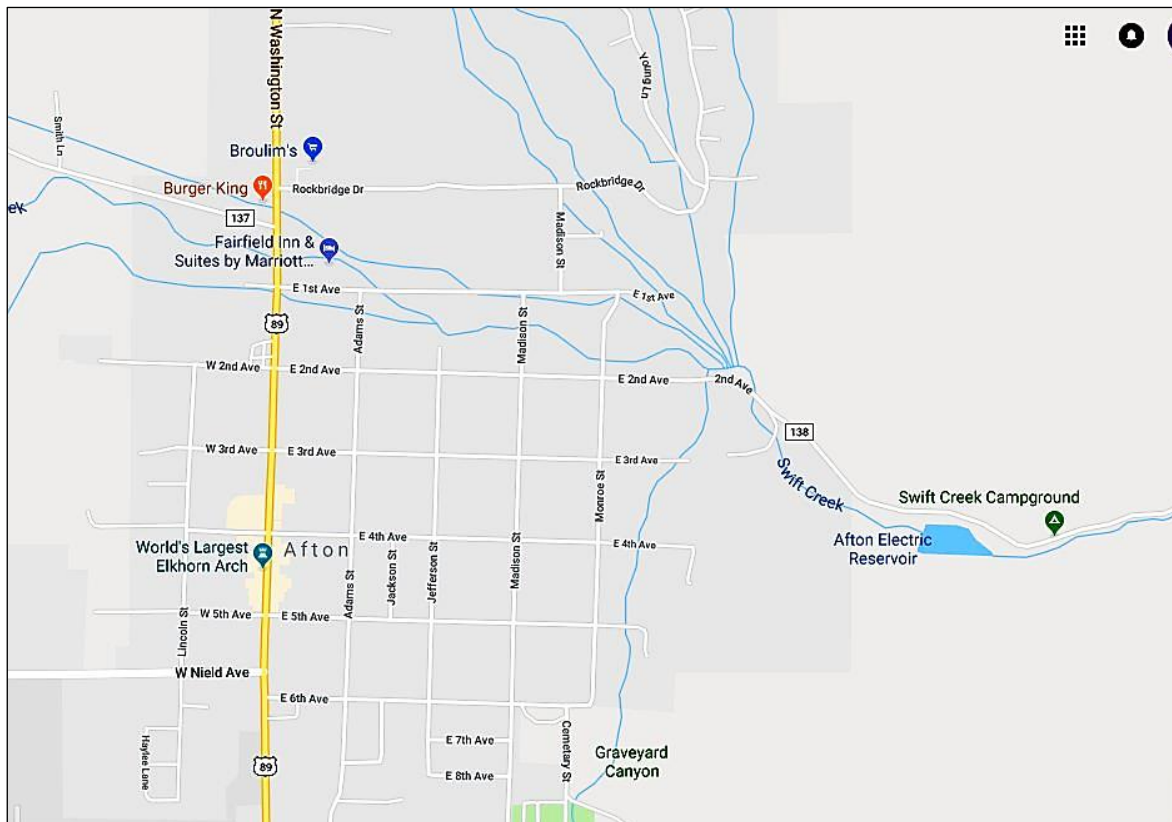
“I remember how hard he worked, and how he sweat, hewing the logs to build the frame and the wooden shafts to turn the saw-crank and move the log carrier, also in digging the mill races and mill pit. I had to help him most of the time. It took a lot of time and work, but was finally completed and he made some lumber.”

“I had to help him most of the time. It took a lot of time and work, but it was finally completed and he made some lumber, but his health was failing and he was not able to operate the sawmill for long.”¹³

“Uncle Mose talks about helping with the "Up and Down Saw Mill" in his history too. He tells what hard work it was to bring the mill irons, which grandfather had bargained for, down the canyon on foot, how heavy they were and how cold they got having to ford icy Swift Creek in several places in order to bring them down.”¹⁴



Swift Creek: World's largest intermittent spring is at Afton



¹³ Life Story of Carl and Ella Cook, compiled by Josinette Cook Whiting, Salt Lake City: 1981, p. 16. The statement that he was not able to operate it very long was not in the printed journal, but it is found in the following named Appendix by Eva Covey Madsen, quoted by her from Carl’s journal.

¹⁴ Eva Covey Madsen, “The Star Valley Period,” published in *The Life and History of Phineas Wolcott Cook*, Appendix.

Eva Covey Madsen notes after his failure to support the family at the sawmill, they tried operating a millinery store, but, not being seasoned merchants, lost their investment in that as well.

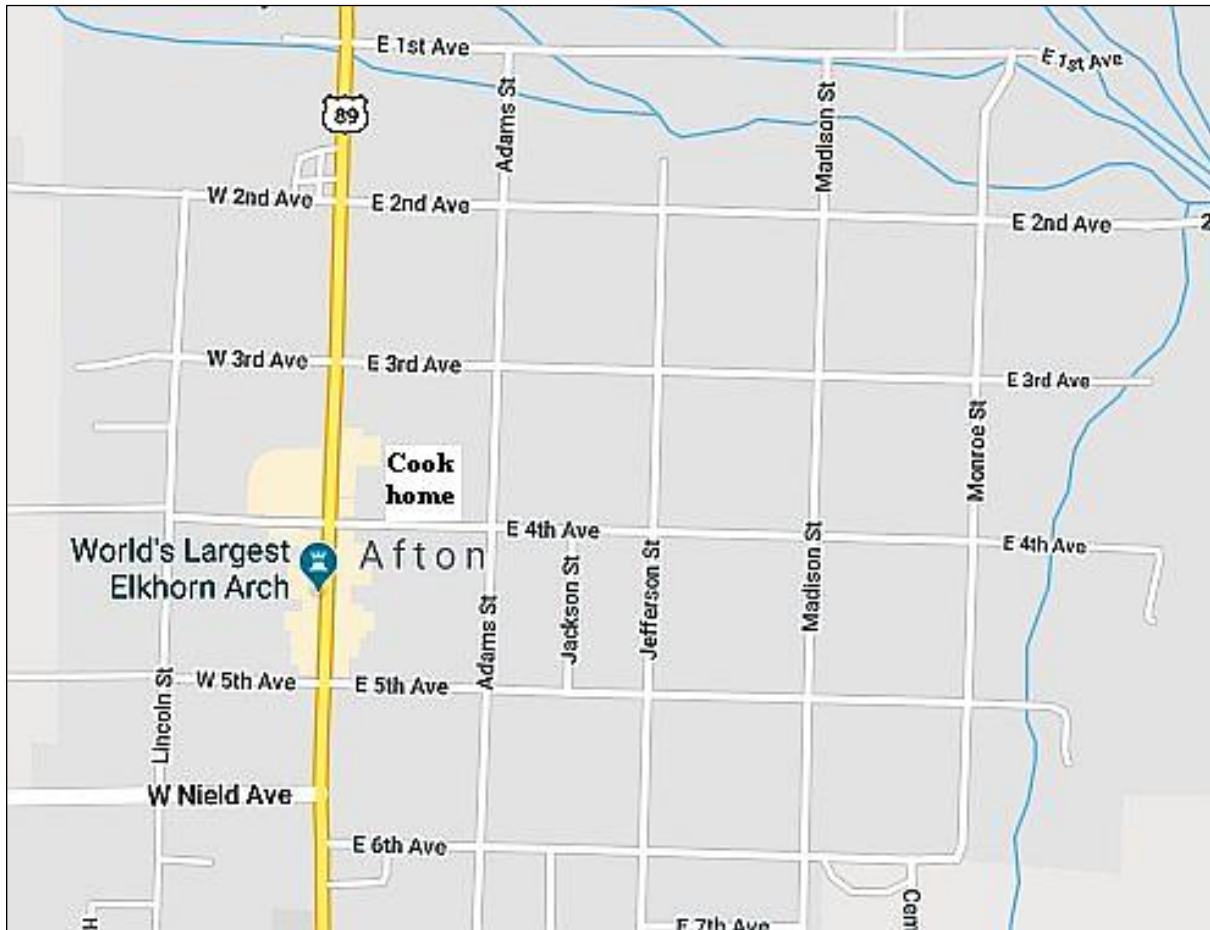
1889-1929 - The Cook Home in Afton



Afton in 1908, much the way it looked for the first 25 years of its existence

After Phineas died in 1900 Johanna continued to live in their house in Afton. She sometimes traveled, especially in the winter, to spend time with her daughter's family in Salt Lake City. But she continued to return to Afton in the spring.

“It is in very recent years that the streets in Afton have been named. What we always called Main Street is now Washington Avenue and the street where grandfather and grandmother lived is now Fourth Avenue. Their house was on the north side of Fourth Avenue a half block east of Washington Avenue. After grandmother passed away in 1929 the house was sold and later the building was torn down and a brick house was built in its place. But, my, how well I remember grandma's little home and the picket fence enclosing her yard filled with columbine, forget-me-nots, pansies, tiger lilies and many other old-fashioned flowers.



Location of the home the Cooks lived in at Afton

“I remember going through the gate, up the path toward the house between two tall pine trees, which were planted as baby pines by the older boys when they were very young, and beautiful big lilac bushes near the house, then passing the pine tree where the humming birds built their nest on a low branch for many years in a row and we could watch from grandma's bedroom window while the mother fed her little ones. And most of all, I'll never forget the yellow rose bush by the door of the room on the west end of the house, which used to be called the store room, but in my lifetime was the room where grandma and mother did the cooking and where we ate our meals, the room where the old-fashioned flour bin still stood in one corner and near it, on a little wooden bench was the bucket of water with the dipper in it.”¹⁵

¹⁵ Eva Covey Madsen, “The Star Valley Period,” published in *The Life and History of Phineas Wolcott Cook*, Appendix.



**This picture was taken in 1911 after the churches were built. It was the Afton Johanna loved.
(Star Valley history and pictures, <http://www.wyomingtalesandtrails.com/afton.html>)**