

John Francis Astle

A Biographical Sketch Written by a Sister – Sarah Isabella Astle Call

John Francis Astle, son of John Astle and Isabella Jane Bradshaw Astle, was born on September 21, 1869, at Montpelier, Bear lake County, Idaho. His parents were of English birth, converts to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They passed through numerous pioneer experiences and early day events in several parts of the West, especially of the settlement of the Bear Lake Valley and the Star Valley in Wyoming.

He was the second child in a family of nine born to his mother. He had an older sister, Elizabeth, less than two years older than he, who was a real pal and sister to him during his entire life. Training in manual labor began at an early age. Children in those days, worked too hard for their tender years. Times were hard, requiring great diligence and caution, and the help of every member of the family to care for the crops, subdue the land, and perform the many tasks necessary to sustain life in new, uncultivated country.

At the age of seven, he started to school which was limited to a few months of each year. There were two teachers in one room, their salary being the tuition paid by the parent of each child. The building was of logs, and it was used for both church and school. There were no desks. The seat he occupied was a slab about eight or ten feet long, supported by legs of wood, two at each end, inserted into holes bored into the slab. On these crude benches, much too high for the little feet to touch the floor, the younger children sat with legs dangling. They used to get very tired and were happy when recess time came or school dismissed for the day.

John F. was a timid child, afraid to hold his own. This caused him a great deal of annoyance since there were some of the older boys at school who tormented him beyond endurance. One day his father said to him, "If you don't whip those boys when they trouble you, I'll punish you when you get home." Well, something did happen. Father had given him courage. He knew that his father would keep his word in regard to the punishment. The affray began, and John F. gathered every ounce of grit possible and let loose. He came out victorious. From that time on, the boys never bothered him again. These were happy childhood days, free from care and worry.



John F. Astle - 1897

At the age of thirteen, responsibilities developed rapidly for so young a lad. At this time, his father married a plural wife (Melvina Ann Banks) according to the “Order” that was then in practice by the Latter-day Saint Church. This necessitated many changes in the family life.

The crusade of persecutions was in earnest by the enemies of the cause. Men were hunted down like the worst criminals in the country. They were in danger of arrest and being dragged into prison where they were brutally treated. They had to be constantly on guard lest they be found and forcibly taken away. For that reason, men in plural marriage were seldom at home and when there, had to live in disguise or secret hiding. There were dangerous times and unexpected visits from the mobocrats usually came during the night, thinking they would most likely find their fugitives at home at that time. With loud knocks and cursing, they would awaken the family and demand a search of the house. They would come in, look in every nook and corner, and ask innumerable questions. Some people were frightened by these visits, but at our home, no one seemed to show any fear. Often Mother, and even the children, threw them off guard by asking them to look in the flour barrel, under the bed, in the cupboards, etc., but they went away having made a fruitless visit. On one such an occasion, Father was safely hidden in a small hideout under the bed, covered over smoothly with the floor carpet, and they never dreamed he was under the floor and could hear everything being said. We felt Father had been protected by a greater power than ours. This kind of life went on for some time. Father, although a very industrious man, could not assist with the farm work.



Father, John Astle

John F., with his two younger brothers, Richard and William, had to carry on the work as few such boys have done in our western states. Being the eldest, John F., of course, assumed responsibility of leadership. At the age of fifteen, he had full responsibility of the farm. The work was extremely difficult, but being blessed by our Heavenly Father, the crops grew and matured. At that time, the most abundant crops we ever had were harvested. It was a marvel to the whole community of Montpelier, Idaho, that so young a boy could so perfectly manage a farm so successfully. All interested neighbors and even our parents were fearful that serious injury to health may result from this steady grind of labor; there was no letting up or resting, even for a day. At one time, Father happened to be at home at threshing time, and he shed tears of sorrow for the way his young sons were working. It was almost more than he could endure, yet it was a situation in which he was helpless to assist without renouncing the principles of plural

marriage. He believed this to be a correct order of marriage as revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith. Mother also believed in this principle as sincerely as did Father.

When John F. was only sixteen years of age, we had hay land on the Bear River flats, as well as land rented from Peter Larsen from which was put up about 75 tons of hay and 2,000 bushels of wheat were harvested. As no modern machinery or equipment was then in use, the hay and bundles of grain were pitched on and off with a pitchfork. Our sister, Elizabeth, often helped with the farm work and proved a valuable assistant as she was a good and willing worker. The labor was too strenuous for any girl, but she never complained. In those times, every member of the family, large and small, seemed to realize the necessity of helping in every way possible. The next year the same procedure was repeated in the home and on the farm with little variation.

During the summer of 1886, Father investigated the Star Valley country in Wyoming and decided to spend the coming winter there. A few Mormon families had moved into this place to get away from the persecutions and where they could at least live at home. During the latter part of 1886, Father, with his second wife Melvina, and their three-week old son, Alma, made the trip from Montpelier to Afton, Wyoming. (Full details are given in the life story of John Astle, our father). John F. was now seventeen, and it was he who drove the team all the way - a distance of fifty miles. It was a bad, stormy trip, with plenty of snow and cold. He returned to Montpelier where Mother and her family remained and carried on the farm work as usual. During the winter, he and his brother Richard, hauled gravel for the grading of the road between Montpelier and Ovid.

In March 1887, John F. decided to make a trip to Wyoming to see how Father and his second family were getting along. The roads were completely blocked with snow, and the only means of transportation was by snow shoes, or skis, as they are now called. Accompanied by an older person, Mr. John Banks, Melvina Ann's father, the destination was reached in safety.

The Lord continued to bless us abundantly. Our family enjoyed the best of health, and our crops were good and plentiful. In the autumn of 1887, Father sold his property in Montpelier and moved the family to Wyoming where we permanently located. The first winter, we lived in one log room, 16 x 16 feet square, with dirt roof and floor of rough boards. We had no furniture to speak of until the next spring. Our beds were bunk style, on top of large sacks of flour (the year's supply for the family). We had no bed springs but plenty of good warm bedding. No one complained. We all enjoyed life as though on a fine vacation. It was a pleasant winter. We children attended school taught by Anson V. Call.

Our good mother had strong courage and faith that never faltered. Her pleasant, cheerful disposition and her fine although firm discipline and instruction in right and wrong were thoroughly taught. It has been said by her sons and daughters that she set an example of honesty



Mother, Isabella Jane Bradshaw

and right living above price – that to lie or steal was a real disgrace, and we all respected this teaching.

We belonged to the Bear Lake Stake of Zion but were organized into a ward with Charles D. Cazier as bishop. There was then only one ward in both upper and lower valleys. This same winter, the various auxiliary organizations were completed, and in those “good old days” practically everyone attended these meetings as well as the Sunday services.

In the spring of 1888, we purchased 160 acres of land from a widow; Star Valley had never been surveyed by the government. What was called a “Squatter’s Right” was the only law at that time in force. It was necessary that those who wished to secure a farm should build a house and live there constantly. Later, when the survey came through,

John F. homesteaded this same 160 acres, and for a few years we made our home on this property. Later, a tract of 80 acres was turned over to our brother Richard.

During this time, my father and brothers did much canyon work getting out timber for fences and building purposes. Later John F. built a new log home a little east of the old one. The logs were hewed on one side so that the inside walls were smooth. The outside was plastered with white lime mortar. The roof was shingled. There were two rooms on the main floor and two above, making the house a nice looking one as well as a comfortable home.

Before continuing further, I wish at this point to write a little incident relating to how my brother John F. met the lovely girl who became his wife. It was a Sunday, and we (the Astle family) were on our way to church as was our Sabbath Day custom. We had just tied the team to the old hitching post when someone remarked, “There is Brother Hepworth with his other family. They have just moved here from Utah.” The family consisted of himself, his wife, and two daughters. As young men were interested in young ladies then, the same as they are today, especially newcomers, John F. remarked, “Well, I’m going to marry the heavier one.” At the time he said this, he little dreamed that this girl would some day be his wife.

Not long after this, however, the courtship really began. The romance was mostly carried on by means of horseback riding, sleigh riding, attending dances, parties, and such. In those early days, young and old really had enjoyable times, and no one was better than another as far as worldly possessions were concerned. We lacked the modern amusements and conveniences of today, but we were nevertheless happy and contented.

The log house we last mentioned, was finally completed, and John F. decided it was time to get married and have a family all his own. So he asked Miss Laurretta Hepworth to be his wife, and she consented. Soon after this, John F. and his bride-to-be and Laurretta's mother, left in a covered wagon for Logan, Utah. It took three days to make the trip. On the 9th of September, 1891, the marriage took place in the Logan Temple with President Marriner W. Merrill officiating. Laurretta was the daughter of Edward Hepworth and Hannah Cowling Hepworth, both English converts to the Church.

Returning, the newly-weds went to their own home – the new log house. They had very little furniture, and what they had was homemade. The bedstead was one made and used by our grandfather, Francis Astle. The bed had no springs – board slats held up the mattress filled with straw. The cook stove was the one father purchased in Omaha, Nebraska, when returning from his trip to the Missouri River for Saints immigrating to Utah. The stove, still in good condition, had been used many years by our parents.

Home life to this young couple was very pleasant indeed. John F. continued farming. On the 13th of July 1892, they were blessed by the birth of their first-born, a boy, and he was given the name of John Francis, Jr. Then on the 9th of September 1894 (their wedding anniversary), a little girl was born, and they gave her the name of Klea Laurretta. A few days after the birth of this child, a letter arrived from “Box B” Salt Lake City. This, as all old members of the Church recall, was always a call from the First Presidency of the Church containing a request for a mission – to go out into the world and preach the Gospel. The letter came as a great surprise to all, as no one had suspected that a mission was in the offing. The call made John F. and Laurretta very happy and yet sad, for coming at this particular time and under present conditions, they hardly knew how it were possible to respond in spite of the fact that they both were willing that this mission should be filled.



Laurretta and John F. Astle with son,
John Francis Jr.

The call specified that John F. was to report to Salt Lake City within three weeks after receiving the letter and be prepared to leave at once for the Southern States Mission. Financially it seemed impossible, not only to go on this mission but to leave a young wife at home with two small babies to take care of. It was surely a trying time for the young couple. Stake President George Osmond, offered to write and tell President Woodruff that everything looked dark, but if possible, John F. would be in Salt Lake City at the appointed time. Through many prayers of

faith to their Heavenly Father by John F. and his loyal wife, a way was opened up where he was able to fill this mission. In order to obtain necessary money, John F. sold hay, grain, and cows, reserving a young heifer and enough wheat for the family's bread. The milk cows were traded for fat cows and sold for cash. At this time, there was one of the worst depressions sweeping the country that the United States has ever known. It was during the Grover Cleveland administration. All people of that time will remember Cox's Army marching to Washington, D.C. It is well to note here that fat cows sold for very little money – the best for \$16.00 and some at \$14.00. John F.'s cows were good ones.

At the appointed time, John F. was in Salt Lake City to report. He was set apart by George Reynolds on the 9th of October 1894 and left there the same night to Chattanooga, Tennessee, in company with Henry Kennington of Afton, Wyoming. They were the first two missionaries sent out from Star Valley Stake.

John F. was appointed to labor in the Mississippi conference. His first missionary companion was Elder Heislet from Colorado. Headquarters of the Conference was at Jackson, Mississippi. John F. had a long walk to reach this destination, in Simpson County, about four miles from the Alabama line. Some of his best recollections of missionary experiences were here. The meetings were advertised with the result that they were well attended, especially the three meeting the first day. After one of these meetings, John F. and companion were invited to the home of a family by the name of Smith. They had fifteen children, all girls but four. The Elders spent the night with these fine people, who treated them to the best that they had, which was very good. The young men returned there many times and always received a warm welcome, never to be forgotten.

The Smith's were investigating our faith very thoroughly. In the meantime, John F. was sent to other parts to labor. However, he did baptize a few in the locality where the Smith's resided. He was transferred to Scotts County for a very short time, had many different companions, and worked in many different localities. His special assignment was breaking in new Elders. When he was set apart by Brother Reynolds, he was told that he would be sent "hither and thither" while laboring in the mission field.

As a Presiding Elder, John F. assisted by a companion, opened nine new fields in Mississippi and Louisiana. In Louisiana, they met the Cook family who really proved very friendly to the Elders. In fact, Mr. Cook remarked that the latch string was always out to them, and even when the Cook's were not at home. The Cook family was also investigators and often attended church. They helped with the music and the singing. In honor of one of the Cook girls, John F. gave the name Arstanie to one of his own daughters.

Many friends were made and some who were especially loyal. John F. tells about one of these friends, a man by the name of Dunk Crane, who befriended him at a time when a mob

gathered around his home and threatened violence. Crane said they would have to “walk over his dead body” before harm could come to John F. Another interesting event took place at Howing Ridge out in the country. A conference and Priesthood meeting were being held, and Elias Kimball was speaking when a mob of fifty men assembled outside. Brother Kimball went out alone to meet them, the rest of the Elders remaining inside to carry on the meeting. Before leaving, Brother Kimball had requested to be remembered in their prayers, not only for his safe return but for the safety of all there at the meeting. In the meantime, Brother Kimball met the mob and was told that all of them were to be out of the county in 24 hours, but they finally agreed on a period of three days. The meeting continued, and at its close all were advised to leave as soon as possible; the incident passed without harm to anyone or further disturbance.

At another time, John F. was threatened to be tarred and feathered, while laboring in the city of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. In those days in the South, strangers were not supposed to go to the house but as was the custom to stand at the gate and call out, “Hello,” until someone would come out. But contrary to custom while out tracting, John F. went up the walk to the porch. Someone, however, warned him not to go to the house, but he paid no attention but kept going. Finally, three men came out and ordered him to the street calling him everything but a gentleman. One of them came close to John F. with clenched fists and threatened to tar and feather him that night and ride the other Elders on a rail out of town. In spite of the fact that these three men were very rough and insulting, John F. did not feel in the least afraid, because he knew they (the Elders) were in the service of the Lord and would be protected. The men finally left and the Elders sought for lodgings for the night but were refused at every place. Feeling insecure, John F.’s companion suggested that they go to a certain hotel there and pawn their luggage for a night’s lodging, but John F. replied, “We have been asked to travel without purse and script.” They knelt in prayer outside the city and spent the night in a partly constructed building.

The next morning they arose and continued their labors in the outskirts of the city. They had previously obtained permission from the city officers to labor in that vicinity, but after the tar and feather threat, the officers absolutely refused to render further protection and told the Elders that they were now on their own to take the risk of being molested. They took the risk all right, and remained in that city until they were ready to leave. They certainly were blessed with our Heavenly Father’s protecting care.

Sometime later, President Elias Kimball received a letter asking if John F. and companion would visit a small colony of Indians in Mississippi, who had been taught the Gospel and were ready for baptism. They left at once, finding it necessary to cross the Pearl River in a canoe as the ferry boat was not in working order at the time. It was a hazardous crossing, but they reached their destination safely and met the Indians who treated them nicely. John F. had

the privilege of blessing and naming one of their babies and baptizing two adults. Then they returned to Louisiana and their work there. John F. had been in the mission field about thirty months and the time was drawing near for his return.

During his absence, the folks at home enjoyed excellent health and were blessed by the Lord beyond expectation. For a time, his wife Laurretta and her two small children lived with her parents. She was full of faith and never complained. Her letters to her missionary husband were always encouraging. She never wrote of any troubles or trials that must have been hers. Nor did she write about being lonely, or suggest that it was time for her husband to come home. She desired that his mission should be completed and that he should receive an honorable release.

It was in April 1897 when John F. received his release. He bade President Swenson (of the Louisiana Conference) and the other Elders goodbye and left for New Orleans. From there, he proceeded to Mobile, Alabama, then to Kansas City, Missouri, and on to Salt Lake City, Utah. He spent the night with an uncle, Charles Astle. The next day he reported his release to the authorities of the Church and was ready to begin the last lap of his journey toward his home in Grover, Wyoming, where he arrived May 6, 1897. The roads from Montpelier to Grover were almost impassable at this time of the year, and the trip was a very tiring one; he was so anxious



John Francis, Laurretta, Klea, and
John Francis Jr.
- Taken about 1897 -

to see his loved ones again. It took one day and a night to make the fifty miles from the Church Headquarters.

Arriving at Mother's house in Afton, Father came to meet him, driving the three miles from the ranch with one horse and cart. They then drove to John F.'s home. The first one to meet him was his little daughter, Klea, who was a tiny baby of one month when he left for his mission in the Southern States.

Klea was a blue-eyed blonde and very fairy-like. Upon seeing her daddy, she ran to the house as fast as her legs could carry her. She must have been frightened a bit to see a man dressed in a Prince Albert suit and a Derby hat coming with her grandfather. But it proved a happy reunion with wife and children.

John F., while on this mission, was blessed beyond measure. He enjoyed good health, impossibilities were overcome, and he slept out only seven nights. Numerous manifestations of the power of the Lord took place. The sick were healed instantly on many occasions. Other equally great events happened under the influence of the Holy Priesthood. Through faith and prayer, John F. had no

fear of mobs, for he knew if he was in the service of the Lord, he would be protected, and he was. The mission proved a blessing not only spiritually, but financially as well.

When he arrived home, he came in time for the spring planting. The Prince Albert suit and Derby hat were put away to be replaced by everyday work clothes. The second day after his arrival, he began plowing. Not being accustomed to such work for more than two and a half years, he felt physically tired after that day's labor was completed, but he got used to it in time.

Soon after his arrival home, John F. was appointed as Superintendent of the Grover Ward Sunday School. He held this position for eleven years until he was again called to take a mission, this time to the Eastern States. He left November 9, 1909. Having prospered in many ways, he now had ten children and a large farm. After being in the mission field for a few months, it became necessary for him to undergo a major operation. He recovered rapidly, and President Rich asked him if he would like to return home, but his answer was, "I would like to finish this mission." President Ben E. Rich then said, "I will give you as honorable a release as anyone who has ever filled a mission." After due consideration, it was decided that John F. should return home, as he was needed there. There was too much heavy outside work for his wife, the boys being too young to sense responsibilities, and also, their daughter Evelyn, was very sick. He was released July 17, 1910, returned home and resumed his labor on the ranch again getting affairs into systematic order, and everything progressed nicely.

He was set apart as second counselor to Bishop Ray S. Thurman, in March 1911. Evelyn, the little daughter seven years of age, passed away the 23rd of March 1911. To John F. this was a great trial.

Previous to this time, the first ranch was sold. He bought another one with more land and extended the acreage. They had a nice large home in town where they lived during the winter months while the children were attending school. The older children went to Afton to the high school and the younger children of school age, to the grade school in Grover.

During the farming season, they all lived in a summer house out on the ranch. On January 16, 1914, a baby girl was born, but lived only a very short time. Her name was Jane. She



Laurretta and John F. Astle Family - 1904

Back Row: Laurretta Hepworth, Klea Laurretta, John Francis Jr., John Francis Astle

Front Row: Evelyn Vilate (Laurretta's Arms), Arstanie Elvira, Clara Pearl, David Elmer, Vernon Lenox

died April 19, 1914. The 14th of July 1915, a little son was born, but passed away shortly after birth. He was blessed and given the name of Isaac. This was the first child of the family to be born in a hospital. All the other children were born at home, and Lauretta was attended each time by a mid-wife. At home, mother and babies were doing fine; but at the hospital it was altogether different. The baby died, but through the blessings of the Lord, the mother was saved, and her life spared for the sake of her family. John F. said that Isaac was the largest baby he had ever seen.

Our mother used to remark, "When trouble begins, it seldom comes alone." This proved the case as far as the John F. Astle family was concerned at this time. John F. had acquired another 160 acres of land his father-in-law once possessed. It was here that Lauretta lived previous to their marriage and here John F. courted her. In all, John F. was now owner of 480 acres of ranch land. They were living in their summer house, when one day in May 1916, the house was razed by fire. John F. and Vernon had left shortly after breakfast to work in the field about half a mile away. All of a sudden, they noticed the house afire – the roof was all ablaze. They both got on horses and rode as fast as they possibly could to the place, but when they got there, the roof was falling in. All they were able to save was a sewing machine and half of one bed. Everything else went up in smoke. All their clothing, with the exception of a Sunday suit belonging to John F. which he had left at the town house in Grover, was destroyed by the fire; also a large tent that happened to be in the house. Everything that it takes to keep house was gone and for a family of twelve.

Just as the fire was under control, but the ruins were still smoking, the banker, Mr. Lynch, of Afton drove up in his car. He was there to sell John F. a car. John F. remarked to Mr. Lynch, "Well, this going some, for you to come here to sell me a car when my home and contents haven't quit smoking yet." But Mr. Lynch was kind enough to take some members of the family in his car to Afton to buy clothing, dishes and food; also to make arrangements for a range. The family spent the remainder of the summer living in a tent. They lived in town during the coming winter, and John F. worked a great deal of the time in the canyon, getting out logs for lumber, preparatory to building a new house. A little later John F. purchased a new seven passenger Overland car.

During the time of World War I, John F. had a beautiful new home constructed and a large barn out on the ranch. Both were strictly modern in every way. The house was one of the first in that vicinity to have hot and cold water and a bathroom. The large barn held 100 tons of hay and 50 head of stock. They were milking at that time from 30 to 35 cows. Each month the milk averaged \$300 in cash. The nice home they owned in Grover was sold and the family lived permanently in the new home out at the ranch.

During the fall and winter of 1918-1919, the whole country was visited with influenza and many died. John F.'s home did not escape this dreaded disease. It brought great distress and sorrow. Vernon, the 20 year old son was the first to go. He died December 23, 1918, and then the next day – Christmas Eve, Laurretta, the mother, passed away. Others of the family were seriously ill, but recovered.

John F. had been ordered to bed, as he was sick and running a temperature. A special nurse from Denver, Colorado, was there to care for them. She said to John F., "Mr. Astle, if you don't go to bed you will be the next one carried away." But he felt that he couldn't give up, because his motherless family needed his attention now, more than ever. The Lord was with them in their sickness and in their trials, which to John F. especially seemed so hard to bear. Relatives and friends did all possible for them and for others in similar conditions. It seemed to John F., in the passing of his dear ones, that no one could be so sorely tried, and even Satan himself, taunted him in his great sorrow by saying, "Now do you believe there is a God? And if there is a God, do you believe He is just?"

At this point, John F. was prompted to read in the Doctrine and Covenants, and he let the book open at random. Therein he read about the Prophet Joseph Smith while in Liberty Jail being greatly distressed in both mind and body, and he cried out unto the Lord: "Yea, O Lord, how long shall they suffer these wrongs and unlawful oppressions?" The Lord answered, "Know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good." In reading this passage of scripture, John F. was greatly comforted and a feeling of peace came over him in his great affliction. He felt that God had not forgotten him in spite of the fact that his faith in God had been severely tried.

Of course, that Christmas (1918) was a sad one, but the family of nine motherless children carried on very well with the eldest daughter, Klea, taking the lead and management of many household duties. She proved very efficient, with the aid of her sisters, Arstanie and Pearl. Grace, six years of age, was the youngest of the family.

In 1920 John F. decided to move to Providence, Utah, thinking to improve conditions for



Astle home in Providence, Utah

school so the children could live at home and not have to travel such a distance to elementary and high school and for other advantages. A well-built, large and spacious brick home was purchased for \$14,500. It was surrounded by 12 ½ acres of excellent farm land located on the north edge of town presenting a lovely view of the valley. In the years that followed, the landscape was made

beautiful with lawns, shrubs, flowers, and different kinds of trees. On the farm land was grown beets, and abundance of fine strawberries, raspberries, blackcaps, and currants, both English and red. There were also fruit trees, such as cherry, apple, peach, plum and prune. At times, beans and cherries were picked for the canneries. There was a fine family garden too. Abundant crops of alfalfa and some field corn were grown. Most of the time horses, cows, and sheep were kept. For many years, John F. engaged in poultry raising, maintaining the white Leghorn chickens. In this he was very successful financially, supplying eggs to the Utah Poultry Association of Logan, Utah, for more than twenty years.

Less than a year after moving to Providence, Klea, the eldest daughter, was married to Joseph R. Baer, and a little later, his daughter Pearl was married to George I. Carling. Both of these gentlemen were from Providence. There were now five daughters left to carry on the housework: Arstanie, Doretta, Agnes, Elva May, and Grace, with one son, David.

For five years, John F. served in the Logan Stake Mission. From this he was released to fill a short term mission in the Central States Mission for the LDS Church. He was set apart November 16, 1925, and assigned to Labor in Austin, Texas. Within himself he did not want to go to Texas, but desiring to be obedient to authority, he went as requested. Some of the greatest blessings he ever received came to him while laboring in this mission. He did much tracting and sold many Church books, especially the Book of Mormon. He made many friends and a few converts.

Each time District Conference was held, he expected to be transferred to a different part of Texas as was his wish, but instead, he was sent right back to labor in Austin. When he left



Clara Holm Steen and John F. Astle
Taken in Logan, Utah

Providence for Austin, he weighed only 112 pounds, but when he was released to come home, his weight had increased to 138 pounds. While there, he enjoyed excellent health.

He returned to Providence from the Central States Mission in June 1926 finding all well at home and the strawberry harvest in progress – the best crop ever raised on this farm. The very day of his arrival he pitched right into picking strawberries. In a short time after his return, he had lost 20 pounds.

He corresponded with a number of the Austin Saints and among them a sister he had greatly admired, Clara Holm Steen. In March 1927, John F., accompanied by his daughter Arstanie, made the trip to Texas by automobile – their destination being, of

course, Austin. When returning home, they brought with them Sister Steen and her two children, Ann and Roy. An older boy, Edward, remained in Texas. At this time, John F. had been a widower for eight years. On March 30, 1927, he and Clara Holm Steen were married in the Logan Temple by President Joseph R. Shepherd.

About this time, John F. ventured into the fox-raising business, purchasing his first pair of silver foxes in December 1926 and January 1927 from George L. Morrison paying \$1,800 for the two. Ten pens were built. Later in the summer that same year, he ranched eight pairs of silver foxes for \$200 a pair.

As a fox rancher he was quite successful and outstanding. But with fox ranching, as with other types of livestock, there were diseases and losses. Two different years, distemper and encephalitis got into the ranch and resulted in over \$5,000 loss in foxes besides \$706 for veterinary services. John F. received two awards for high increase and fine quality of pelts and blue ribbons at fairs and fox shows for superior animals. His son David was very good to help his father with the foxes. In December 1944, John F. decided to close out his business, because of a rapid decline in prices of fox pelts due to World War II. So he terminated the industry, being free from debt with sufficient money in the bank to enable him to live in comfort for the rest of his days.

Now let us go back to the time when John F. and his children left the ranch at Grover and moved to Providence. He sold his ranch, machinery, cows and horses to a brother-in-law, Edgar Hepworth. When the depression came, it was very difficult for Edgar to make any payments, so John F. took the place back returning all money Edgar had paid in equity. So his sons, Francis Jr. and David, decided to run the ranch for one year, but they did not do so well. John F. had to borrow \$1,000 in order to pay taxes and other indebtedness, so he took over the ranch to work on it himself also retaining the Providence place. He had to travel from Utah to Wyoming almost constantly making the trip mostly by night. He made a little money and bettered his condition somewhat and then leased the ranch to Duill Taylor for three years for a "cash lease". Taylor did well, and at the end of the second year, made arrangements to buy the ranch on time, but because of speculations, he failed to keep up the payments and lost out. John F. had to redeem the place by assuming a mortgage. He had \$5,000 equity in the ranch, but by paying the debts, he lost \$3,000. David again took over to run the ranch for one year.

In the meantime, John F. went to Southern Utah and purchased 209 head of two year old steers. To pay for them and renew the mortgage on the Providence home, he signed in one day for a loan of \$9,000. It was a hard struggle to get out of debt. The Cache Valley Banking Company and the Utah Mortgage Company wanted John F. to forget the Wyoming ranch, or else he would be turned out in the street. But he told them that every cent he owed would be returned

to them if it took every dollar he had. This was during the depression that followed the First World War.

To make a long story short, through plenty of hard work and the blessing of the Lord, that debt was paid. The president and the cashier of the bank had told John F. a number of times that he had done better than any of their customers for as they said, "It was one chance out of a hundred, to make good." At this critical time, when everything appeared dark, the sale of the ranch in Wyoming offered the only ray of hope from financial difficulties. A friend, John Anderson of Grover, became the new owner of the ranch, and although the real estate, buildings, hay, and some of the cattle were disposed of at a sacrifice, John F. was able to save his home in Providence. This brought a feeling of contentment that he was so greatly blessed. Although some of these trying experiences of the past were hard to undergo, yet such proved blessings in disguise. These trials meant courage, hard manual labor, and trust in the Lord.

Often had the road of life been very rugged and steep uphill to climb, but through faith and untiring efforts, the Lord was ever mindful of my brother, John F. It had ever been his desire to accomplish the good not only in a material way but in a spiritual way as well. It had been often quote that "God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform." This same quotation proved true in the case of John F. which was indeed a great blessing to him.

It was in Austin, Texas, that he met a lady (Clara Holm Steen), a convert to the Church, who later became his wife. She has proved a loyal and devoted companion. At the close of the year of 1943, they were consulted in regards to both taking a mission. Each underwent a physical examination, but it was found that the wife had very high blood pressure. When she was interviewed by one of the authorities (Alma Sonne), his advice was to remain at home, and although John F. had passed the test successfully, he was advised to also stay at home and take care of his wife. This was a great disappointment, especially to John F. as he was so desirous for going on another mission. President Dunn then called John F. to labor in the Logan Stake as a missionary. In this, and in a previous mission in the Logan Stake, he labored seven years in all.

The children are all married now with families of their own. A daughter, Klea Lauretta, wife of Joseph R. Baer of Providence, passed away November 1939 after several year of illness. She was the mother of seven children, but a son preceded



John F. Astle Family

Back Row: John Francis Jr., Grace, Doretta, Pearl, David
Front Row: Arstanie, John Francis, Elva, Agnes

in death while yet in infancy. During Klea's married life, she also mothered the six children of her husband, one of these, an infant. She was really a good mother to all of these children. Klea was the eldest daughter and when her mother died had taken full responsibility in caring for her father, brothers, and sisters. Her death was a sad blow to her loved ones.

Because of the strenuous labors on the farm, John F. decided to sell the Providence home. Now they are living in a lovely place under the shadows of the beautiful Temple where they hope to spend the rest of their declining years and devote part of their time to working in the House of the Lord, for their kindred dead. John F. has been greatly interested in promoting the Genealogical Research for his people. As to his general makeup, he is of a retiring nature, quiet and unassuming, yet businesslike and efficient in any undertaking. He was always a pillar of strength in his father's household, and especially so with his own large family who are all upright and good citizens, both in the church and in every day life.

It can be truthfully said, that while he was born of goodly parents, who endured the hardships and trials of pioneer life in Utah, Idaho, and Wyoming, John F., in a measure, carved his own life and made it what it is today. Wherever he had lived, he has been very generous financially with the Church, regarding tithes, offerings, and other donations. He has never



John F. Astle

refused any opportunity of working in the Church and enjoys those labors while in the service of the Lord. He attributes his success in life to being honest with God, to give Him the credit for all the blessings that came his way. The many experiences of the past have helped to a great extent to enrich his life and have greatly strengthened his testimony at to the truthfulness of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

He lived a long useful life to the age of 82 years. He passed away November 7, 1951, at his home in Logan, Utah. Funeral services were held in Providence First Ward, also a short service in Grover, Wyoming. He was buried in the Grover Cemetery beside his wife, Laurretta. He always loved Star Valley and carried many fond memories close to his heart.