

## LIFE HISTORY OF JOHN FRANCIS ASTLE, JR.

John Francis Astle Jr. was born July 13, 1892, in Grover, Lincoln, Wyoming. He was born in a four room log cabin his father had built before marrying. He was the first child of John Francis Astle and Lauretta Hepworth. They called him J. Francis to distinguish him from his father. His father's parents were John Astle and Isabella Jane Bradshaw. His mother's parents were Edmund Hepworth and Hannah Cowling.

J. Francis had twelve brothers and sisters: Klea Lauretta 1894, Vernon Lennox 1898, Arstanie Elvira 1899, Clara Pearl 1901, David Elmer 1902, Evelyn Violet 1904, Doretta Alta 1906, Agnes Lenora 1907, Elva May 1909, Grace Emily 1912, Jane 1914 (lived three days), Isaac 1915 (died at birth).

When J. Francis was just two years old, and a few days after Klea was born, his father was called to serve a thirty month mission. He left in October 1894, and was released in 1897. During his absence, the family enjoyed good health and lived for a time with Lauretta's parents.

In 1906, the farm was sold and the family moved to a large home with more acreage in the town of Grover. The house was just west of the school. The children could do morning chores and still get to school on time.

J. Francis spent his childhood helping his father and learning to work very hard. In November 1909, his father again left his wife and children to serve a mission. J. Francis, being the oldest child, had to help his mother with the work and the younger children. His father returned in July 1910 when it was decided that the work was too much for the young family and daughter Evelyn became very sick. During the winter of 1910, all of the children caught whooping cough. Evelyn got pneumonia and died March 23, 1911.

When J. Francis was seventeen he began spending the summer herding sheep in the Grey's River area. He had many experiences with bears and other exciting episodes.

He loved to tease the younger children, dunking their heads in the ditch and getting a great laugh out of it.

J. Francis had several girlfriends. He courted them in a one-seated, black-topped buggy during the spring, and a sleigh in the winter. He liked to dance and play basketball.

J. Francis courted Signe Katheryn Fosberg and they were married April 21, 1915, by his father John Francis Astle, who was the Justice of the Peace. She was eighteen and he was twenty-two years old. They homesteaded 160 acres with John Francis Senior and later received a deed for 80 acres just north of Bradshaw Creek.

On June 30, 1916, they received their endowments and were sealed in the Logan Temple,

Logan, Cache, Utah.

Signe Katheryn and her sister came from Norway in 1902. Their father, John Forsberg, was dead, and their mother, Amelia Anderson, sent the children to America with a missionary, Lars Halling. He and his wife, Stenie, had no children of their own. The girls were given lots of love from Uncle Lars and Aunt Stenie. Their mother was able to join them years later when they were living in Logan.

J. Francis and Signe Katheryn's first child, Atelia, was born Jan. 19, 1916, and Jean was born March 27, 1918. Signe loved them, and enjoyed cooking, sewing, and raising flowers. During times J. Francis was away from home, doing freighting and other work, his sister Doretta stayed on the ranch with Signe and the children. They enjoyed each other's company.

In the winter of 1918, influenza spread all over the valley and whole families were quarantined. In many homes there were not enough well people to care for the sick. Pearl was the only well person in John Francis Sr.'s home. J. Francis went to their ranch every day and took care of the animals, milked the cows and left a large container of milk on the steps for them.

On Dec. 23, 1918, J. Francis's brother Vernon died. The next day, J. Francis was at the cemetery for Vernon's funeral when he received word that his mother had also passed away. Their deaths brought much sorrow and hardship that Christmas season. In order to contain the influenza, funerals were not held, so they were buried without a ceremony.

John Francis Astle Sr. moved his family to Providence, Utah, in 1920. After other ventures failed, J. Francis and David ran their father's ranch for a year, however, it didn't work out.

On June 14, 1920, J. Francis and Signe had their first son, Junior. He was a beautiful baby with a dark complexion. At two and a half years old, he was playing outside when he was attacked by a neighbor's pig. He died on November 14 (27?), 1922, due to the bites on his ear and face.

After a fire destroyed their first home, the family moved to a larger one north of Grover. Boyd was born there on Dec. 28, 1922, just a month after Junior died. There were happy times there. The children had a play house, lambs, cows, and horses. Their aunts lived nearby and tended them often.

To provide for the growing family, J. Francis farmed, milked cows, and cut and hauled logs from the canyon. He also hauled freight on a sleigh or wagon from Montpelier. He wore a big bearskin coat to keep warm and brought the children peanut brittle and ginger snaps in the grub box.

In March 1925, they decided to move the family to Logan, Utah. It was cold and the snow was deep. Francis put the car on a sleigh, and with a four horse team, they started toward Montpelier through Crow Creek Canyon. Signe and the children rode in the car wrapped in blankets. They stayed one night at a half-way house. From Montpelier, Signe and the children rode a train to Logan.

Francis returned to Grover to get the furniture. They moved into a house next to the Logan River bridge on South Main.

Signe's mother arrived from Norway and was very good to them. A little brother, Kay, was born May 8, 1925.

J. Francis found work in the sugar factory and Signe worked at night at a hotel in Logan. The Astle aunts often tended the children. In February 1926, Signe left J. Francis and the children. She didn't return home from work one night. A few days later, she called from California. She never returned to the family after this and they were later divorced. This was a terrible loss for J. Francis and the young children. He said it would have been easier to lose her in death.

He had quite a challenge taking care of four children and making a living. He moved the family to Providence in order to get more help with the children from his sisters. For about a year and a half, his sisters and others helped by tending and taking care of his children. They had a large garden and apple trees. The kids worked much harder than most other children their age. For a time he hired a woman to care for them.

J. Francis's sister Pearl married George Carling and through them he met Laura Thelma Carling, George's sister. She had been born in Mexico and had lived in Oak City, Preston, Idaho, and other places. She worked at the Union Knitting Mill in Logan. Her parents were John Henry Carling and Mary Elizabeth Lovell. Her father died in Preston, Idaho.

J. Francis and Laura were married in the Logan Temple on April 20, 1927. She was twenty-five and he was thirty-four years old.

J. Francis hauled rock from Providence Canyon to the railroad for the sugar factory. He worked on the building of the Cutler Dam by Beaver Dam, Utah. He would be gone all week, and return only on Sunday. This was difficult for Laura, getting a ready-made family and not feeling well herself.

The girls helped her wash clothes on the washboard, bottle fruit, sew, pick strawberries, beans, etc. from a large garden, and keep house. Jean said, "When Dad married Laura we had a home again. Our new mother made us clothes and we had roller skates. Mother was very sick for two months before Thelma was born, but we knew how to cook, clean, and wash clothes on the washboard."

J. Francis and Laura's first child, Thelma Astle, was born January 18, 1928, in Providence, Utah.

In the fall of 1928, J. Francis moved the family to Grover, Wyoming. He hoped to better support the family, logging, farming, and trying other endeavors. They moved into the home his grandfather, John Astle had built. It was near the school and the church. J. Francis bought a cow

and two good horses. The family went with him to the canyon to get wood or logs to sell. It was a cold winter with deep snow.

Leon Carling Astle was born in this home on April 9, 1930. Times were hard and money wasn't plentiful, but the family was clean and neatly dressed. They also had good food to eat.

They moved to Auburn, Wyoming, a town west of Grover, and Elmo Carling Astle was born there on December 19, 1931. Laura was very sick and a woman came to help them. They went to church in the old rock church. The children walked a mile to school.

J. Francis had a herd of cows to milk and the older children helped with the milking.

“When Dad and Mother lived in Auburn they lived in one side of the Lemmon house and another family lived in the other half. It only had four rooms. The man living in the other half had two or three cows and when he got his milk check, he would go to the store and buy cigarettes and coffee before he would buy any food. The wife would come and beg food items from Mother.” (Told by Dee Astle.)

In 1932, when school was out J. Francis and Laura purchased a house and moved it onto land that they owned, one half mile west of the main highway through Grover. The land was on the north side of the road between Auburn and Grover. The house had two rooms on the ground floor and two rooms above. They built a lean-to on the north side, giving them a bedroom for the parents and a porch. Cracks between the wall and roof were wide enough to see daylight through. Imagine the cold that came in through them. The house was never painted on the exterior. The out-house was built quite far away from the home for sanitary reasons. It was a two-holer and catalogs (free paper) were the paper of choice.

The kitchen had a cook stove. A wood burning stove kept the living room fairly warm. The bedrooms had no heat. It was common to find ice on the water bucket when the weather was cold. They heated water on the kitchen stove for bathing. A big round tin tub was placed in the kitchen once a week for Saturday night bath. The first one to bathe had the only clean water. Monday was wash day for clothes. Water was again heated in the boiler on the stove and clothes were washed on a washboard in the tin tub. They were hung outside to dry. In the winter they froze stiff as boards and were brought into the house to finish drying.

In 1932, Atelia went to live with Aunt Doretta for a year in Providence. She worked in Logan and helped Aunt Doretta with her son Junior. She married James W. Parry on September 29, 1935.

Dee Carling Astle was born in this home on November 9, 1933. According to Jean's history, they had a drought the following summer and had to sell the cows for \$25 a head. In the spring of 1935, the family moved to Bedford, Wyoming to farm the Fluckiger ranch. They shared a home with the Fluckigers. During the move, Leon fell off a horse and broke his wrist. Jean left home to work in Georgetown, Idaho.

In the fall of 1936, the family moved back to their home in Grover. In September, J. Francis asked Jean to return home to help because Laura was very sick. Frances Astle was born on October 3, 1936. The younger boys were sent to get willows at the back of the field and when they returned they had a new baby sister.

In December, near his sixteenth birthday, Boyd joined the Civilian Conservation Corp, and at nineteen went into the service. Jean married Lawrence J. Merritt on July 14, 1937. All the children, as they became old enough, worked with their parents, and also had jobs helping other people. J. Francis and Laura taught their children to be good, honest, dependable workers, and were proud of their accomplishments.

From the time J. Francis began as a child working with his father, he continued to be a tireless worker, doing any type of honest work to support his family. He enjoyed farming and tried to own the best horses and cattle. He took very good care of them.

The first several years in Grover, he hauled logs and cord wood for the creamery. One year he paid Jean's high school tuition by hauling wood to the school. He hauled logs until a short time before his death.

During the summer of 1942, with the help of his three youngest sons, ages eight, ten, and twelve, he hauled ninety-thousand feet of logs for the remodeling of the stake house in Afton, Wyoming. The logs were all taken out of Grover Canyon. The trees and logs were all cut with hand saws. The mountain on which he logged was very steep. Two horses could skid 1,000 feet of logs at a time down the steep hill, part way to the truck. Then the logs were divided and half of them were skidded to the truck. In the winter, logs were hauled to the mouth of Grover Canyon on a sleigh and then loaded onto the truck and taken to the Afton saw mill.

Dee tells of an experience J. Francis had while logging, which concerned horses. "Dad had a well-matched team of Bay mares. If he went out to catch them with his dress clothes on, he could not catch them. They were the pride of the family. One time, up Grover Park, there were several men and teams breaking a road through the deep snow. One fellow from Turnerville had a tall, thin, grey horse that he wanted to trade Dad for one of his Bay mares. Dad said if the grey horse could wallow through the deep snow from the back sleigh to the front one, he would make the trade. The grey horse made its way around to the lead position, so Dad traded him. When he came home with the grey, mother and the kids were very unhappy about it. Dad named the grey horse 'Dutch' and kept him until he was twenty-two years old or more. He turned out to be one of the best canyon horses Dad had ever owned."

When logging in the summer, the flies and mosquitoes were so thick that the boys thought they would be eaten alive, but J. Francis didn't seem to be bothered by them.

J. Francis was a handy carpenter, building his own buildings, barn, chicken coop and garage. He kept his machinery in good condition. He didn't have to take things to others to have them

repaired.

During World War II J. Francis was a trucker, taking livestock to Idaho Falls. He hauled coal from Cokeville and Kemmerer. Leon recalls making three trips to Cokeville in one day, loading coal from the railroad car into the truck and then unloading it for a customer. This was all loaded by hand with shovels. J. Francis also hauled coal from the Blind Bull coal mine up Grey's River.

Leon also remember going with his Dad in the truck that didn't have a heater. On trips to and from Kemmerer, Leon would get out and run to keep his feet warm. He said Dad never complained or seemed to get cold.

For awhile, J. Francis had a header and spent the fall cutting and thrashing grain for himself and others. He did only essential work, such as milking the cows, on Sundays. He said, "If you work on Sunday, you'll break down on Monday."

Laura had a flock of chickens, which at times numbered up to 200, throughout the years. J. Francis would furnish the feed and she took care of the eggs. The children cleaned the coop and helped. The egg money was Laura's to spend on food, clothing, and other needed items. Their first refrigerator was purchased after the war with the egg money.

At the end of world War II others bought their own trucks and J. Francis mostly hauled logs. Boyd and Kay returned from the service and Boyd married June Corsi from Etna on February 16, 1946. Kay married Dorothy Taylor on August 24, 1948.

J. Francis had the contract and drove the school bus in the winters of 1944 and 1945. They went down the Auburn road to Auburn, the Salt River bridge, through Johnsonville, Leavitville, Nield String, and to the high school in Afton. Leon was fourteen and a Freshman in high school. He drove the school bus at times when his father was busy. Can you believe it?

In 1947 and 1948, a new house was built east of the family home on the farm west of Grover. The three boys at home, Leon, Elmo, and Dee, helped with the construction. All the lumber, including shingles, was cut and hauled out of Grover Canyon. J. Francis also hauled the cinder blocks and other materials necessary from Idaho Falls. They were happy to have modern conveniences such as inside running water, oil stove for heat, a bathroom, and much more room. The walls were made of cinder block with plaster inside. It was a three level home with the basement serving as a fruit room, sleeping quarters and extra storage. The main floor consisted of living/dining room, a very small kitchen, two bedrooms and a bathroom. Upstairs was one long unfinished room for sleeping and storage.

Thelma married Gordon R. Beyeler on January 10, 1949.

The family worked hard, but had enjoyable times together. Jean recalls riding a sleigh on her birthday to the warm Sulfur Springs north of Auburn, to swim. They went on picnics up to Snake

River and Cottonwood Lake, attended ward parties and activities, and taffy candy pulls, wrestling to see who was the boss. They shared a bicycle and riding horses.

J. Francis was a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints all his life. In Grover, he was the Second Counselor in the MIA, Second Assistant to the Sunday School Superintendent for many years, a Star Valley stake missionary for two years, and a Home Teacher most of his life. He was active in the church until his death.

He had many friends and was willing to help anyone in need. He was friendly to all, young and old. Jay Hepworth remembers when he was a small boy cutting across lots, J. Francis would stop his plowing to visit with him and his friends. "He was a great friend."

In August 1950, while taking care of some horses, one kicked him and broke his arm. This seemed to be the start of a downward trend in his life.

His son, Leon, left in October 1950 to serve a mission in the Western and Northern United States. During that winter J. Francis was diagnosed with cancer. After several trips to doctors in Salt Lake City and an operation, he became worse and spent the last few months in bed. Laura cared for him at home and even learned to give him shots to relieve the pain.

Ray S. Thurman spoke at his funeral and said, "He was a man of great endurance, never complained when I was there. All through his illness, I never knew a man who took it so graciously as he did, not complaining."

Through all his pain he called in each of his family members, one-by-one, and gave them advice about what he would like them to do. When he was talking to Laura he said, "I will come back and help you all I can." Leon was advised by his Mission President to remain on his mission, so he was not there.

J. Francis was a small man, but very strong and full of vigor. In the later years, he became stocky, but during the last few months of his life he lost sixty pounds in six weeks.

He passed away on October 9, 1951, at the age of fifty-nine, at his home in Grover. The funeral was held in the Grover Ward Chapel and he was buried October 13, 1951, in the Grover Cemetery.

He had ten children, nine living, and nine grandchildren at the time of his death. Four children were not married, with three still living at home, Elmo, Dee, and Frances.

*Compiled and written by Leon Carling Astle and Blanche Linford Astle. April 1999.*

*Information taken from the histories of:*

*John Francis Astle, Senior*

*Lauretta Hepworth Astle*

*Jean Astle Merritt*

*Laura Thelma Carling Astle*

*John Francis Astle, Jr., Funeral Services*

*Memories of:*

*Leon Carling Astle*

*Dee Carling Astle*

*Doretta Astle Hoskins*