

# Orville and Helen Buck - Pioneers

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(from Edith Haroldsen Lovell, *Captain Bonneville's County*)

In 1873, old Israel Heald was lonesome for homefolks at his Ranch near present Idaho Falls. He wrote to his sister Helen and her husband Orville Buck in Maine:

"I really wish you and Orville were here. You could make money making butter. I shall have twenty nice cows next summer and about twenty heifers that will come on next season. . . I had a contract to furnish hay for the stage company last year and made one thousand dollars but I put it [all] into teams and machinery. . . but I am getting too old to want to work so I see to my horses and cattle and let the world wag on."

"I was the first to locate here and have a charming location. . . . There is a strong probability that we shall have a railroad through this valley next summer; if so it will settle very fast. I should like to have you and your family here very much. Your boys could grow up with the country. . . Our mail is not at all regular this winter, the stage horses have distemper. --Ever the same, I. Heald."

Helen and her husband Orville Buck had decided to move to a higher, drier climate for Orville's ill health; with characteristic New England spirit they accepted Israel's invitation and came as pioneers to a bleak spot 150 miles from a doctor.

Financed by Mrs. Buck's share of the Standish estate, the Bucks and their five children—Alice Winthrop, James A., John H. and Ellis came by train to Corinne, Utah, and by team and wagon to Eagle Rock. They went on to Heald's Island for the winter. . . . In the spring they moved to Willow Creek, where they built a two-room log cabin with a dirt roof. A son and daughter were born there.

The Bucks had been told that the climate was too cold and season too short to raise wheat. The first summer on Willow Creek Orville Buck and George Heath planted and irrigated some hay and experimented with small fields of wheat. The wheat ripened so they cut it and ran loose horses over it in a round corral to thresh out the grains. They gathered the wheat and chaff up on a canvas tarpaulin and dumped it into boxes. They separated the wheat from the chaff by pouring from one box to another on a windy day.

Food was plentiful but much work was required to prepare it, and vegetables were scarce in the long winters Mrs. Buck sent the children to Willow Creek with a pole and a string baited with a worm on a bent pin to catch fish for a meal. Sometimes Jim Buck brought home a deer. They had cattle, pigs, chickens, and ducks. Relatives in the east sent them salt fish. Mrs. Buck made butter, cheese, jellies, jams, mincemeat and preserves.

They made the soap they used from lye strained out of wet ashes. They made a wooden floor from wooden boxes relatives sent containing supplies. Realizing the need for medical aid, they sent for books on medicine and drugs, and Mrs. Buck performed duties of a midwife. When smallpox started in the upper Snake River Valley, they received vaccine from Fort Hall and Salt Lake City. During the Nez Perce Indian uprising led by Chief Joseph in 1877 they moved temporarily to Fort Hall.

Orville Buck started school in his home in 1879. He hired Jennie Beam as teacher the first year. The Buck School District was formed in 1880. It included the children of John and George Heath, neighbors.

Notes by Mary Jane Fritzen: Orville and Helen Buck are ancestors of the Buck Funeral Home family.