

August 2013

Arta McLain Seely's Wagon Wheel Story
Written by Richard Kent Seely

Becky has asked that I record the Arta McLain's wagon wheel story. There are really three parts to it. The first was written by Arta McLain Seely himself. Verna Seely Carter (Aunt Verna) in her remembrances about her father is the second part, and the third part of the story is mine. I think you should read the story in that order. What follows is what I have written, or part three.

BACKGROUND:

Arta McLain Seely (born 3 Sep 1874, died 17 May 1945) was my grandfather. He wrote, "On August 13, 1912 I bought a 480-acre cattle ranch in western Box Elder County." He moved his family to a ranch in Rosette, near Park Valley, Utah. [Rosette/Park Valley are located north by northwest of the Great Salt Lake and near the Utah-Idaho border.] He was made Bishop of the Rosette Ward August 31, 1913. There weren't many people in the area - as evidenced by the "one-room" schoolhouse. Telephones and electricity would not come to the area until years after Aunt Verna's story takes place.

Most of the people living in the area were members of the LDS Church, and Arta McLain served as their Bishop. Those who knew him called him, Bishop, A.M., or Mac.

The story begins with an accident. A young boy by the name of Roy Kunzler had fallen off a fully loaded hay wagon and a wagon wheel had run completely over his head. The head was crushed. (When my mother told my brother Jim the story, she said you could see the track of the wagon wheel in the boy's head.) It was a miracle the boy was not killed instantly, but he clung to life. The nearest doctor to the boy was in Brigham City (well over a hundred miles away and at least a two day trip by wagon). There were no medical people of any kind in the Park Valley area either. Not even a mid-wife to deliver babies.

The parents, in their anguish, did the only thing they could. They called for their Bishop to come and administer to the boy. It took time for the Bishop to get to the boy. (I don't know how much.) Aunt Verna's account records that Arta McLain did administer to the boy and blessed him that he would live a normal life. He then took the boy's head in his hands and reshaped it as best he could. (Certainly there would have been brain damage as well as smashed bones. Aunt Verna's verbal accounts to me lead me to understand the head had squished nearly flat, with bulges on both sides where the ears were.) Aunt Verna's writings conclude with a statement to the effect that because of faith and the power of the priesthood, a miracle occurred; the boy survived, and lived a normal life.

During my younger years and into my mid thirties, I had heard the story many times. I seriously questioned it; I doubted that the story was true. Oh, I could believe the boy was hurt and my grandfather had given him a priesthood blessing, but a miracle of such a magnitude! The medical impossibility - I just didn't buy it. I knew my aunt to be an honest and truthful person; but, no. The story just could not be factually true.

Now for my part of the story; my mother died on 24 April 1980 and we were holding a "viewing" at what was for years called the Felt mortuary in Brigham City (just east of the Tabernacle). There were a lot of people that came to the viewing. I had left the "reception line" back by the casket and gone to the front of the building when I noticed a group of older people coming in the South door of the mortuary rather than using the main entrance. I approached the group to thank them for coming and to find out who they were. They introduced themselves (the names meant nothing to me.) and told me they had driven in from Park Valley to come to the viewing - to pay their respects to the Seely family. (I thought they were referring to my parents.) I was impressed they would come that far and expressed it.

One of the oldest looking gentlemen answered me; saying, "Of course we had to come to pay our respects to the Seely family. I owe my life to your grandfather." There was a slight pause as he sensed my disbelief. He continued, "When I was a boy a loaded hay-wagon ran over my head and crushed it. Your grandfather, Bishop Seely, administered to me and reshaped my head with his hands." I must have looked startled and disbelieving because he then turned his head, lifted what sparse white hair he had, and said, "Look". There on the side of his head by his ear was the imprint of a large opened hand. All four fingers and the thumb were extended and clearly visible!

The man spoke clearly and coherently. He stood up straight and appeared to have full use of his body. When he moved there was no jerkiness or hesitation. His body movements were smooth but were starting to slow due to advanced age. With a slight smile, he turned, and with the others in his party, went to pay his respects.

Notes:

Jim Seely writes:

Apparently nobody knows for certain just when the Seely's moved to Rosette. I remember dad saying that he was nine years old when they moved. Since he was born in 1903, then that would have made it sometime in 1912. I'm also not sure just when Arta was made bishop (we could probably find that out) or when he healed the "boy." Also, we don't know how old the "boy" was. If we "guess" that the healing took place in say, 1915 and the boy was say 9 years old, then in 1980 when he attended the funeral, he would have been 74. I remember people from Park Valley attending the funeral, but wasn't aware that one of them was the "boy" that was healed, until you told me about it following the funeral. I believe you told me that he was a Kunzler, which is a rather common name in the Park Valley area. In any event, all the accounts of the story seem to fit together very nicely. I would like to hear Richard Anderson's account, as I am sure the story would have also been related to him by Aunt Leola.