

## The Burton Durwood Prentice Octagon House



People driving east on Highway 34 through Laird are often fascinated by the octagon house sitting at the south end of Main Street and wonder how it came to be. The following story by Dorsey Dienes is about the history of the Burton Durwood Prentice family home.

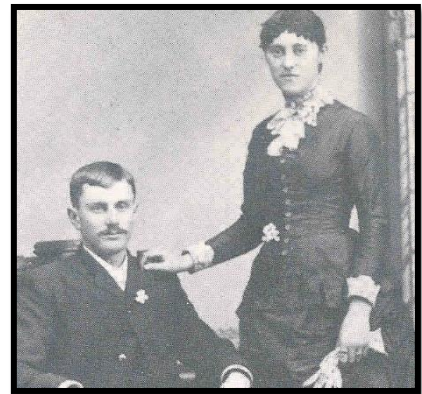
### **Burton Durwood Prentice**

Burton Durwood Prentice of Sandusky, Ohio was born in 1860 and was an Oberlin graduate. He married a music teacher from White Hall, WI, Miss Idellah May Knight in the early spring of 1883.

Burton and his young bride had both been exposed to the Horace Greeley fever to "Go West, Young Man, and Grow with the Country." As soon as they were married, they prepared for their long journey west to Colorado.

Burton's father gave the newlyweds a fine team of horses as a wedding gift and Idellah's parents helped to equip the covered wagon to make it as comfortable as possible for the long trip.

"Burt" and "Dell", as they called each other, loaded the wagon with all the necessities. Food and bedding held a prominent claim on available space in the wagon, but Dell's melodeon and Burt's violin were also priorities, as they both enjoyed music. The beginning of the journey was uneventful, but upon reaching Burr Oak, Kansas they made a stop—two new members were added to Burt and Dell's family on a cool evening in December. Baby boy Earl made his entrance into life on December 14, 1883 and on the same night, one of the driving horses also had a baby boy.



**Burton and Idellah Prentice**

Dell and baby Earl remained under a doctor's care in Burr Oak. Burt, while waiting for his wife and son to be able to travel, took a train to Creston, Iowa where he bought a load of cattle. During the last lap of the journey, Dell, with baby Earl at her side, drove the team toward Wray while Burt drove the cattle.

Wray was a small community and among those who especially welcomed the Prentices was the Weaver family who lived near the depot of the Burlington Railroad. The Prentices friendship circle widened as their instrumental and vocal music enriched the social lives of Wray residents.

The Prentices staked out a homestead claim and timber claim in the sandhills three and one-half miles northeast of Wray in early 1884. It was 480 acres in all. At the time, a sod house with two rooms was constructed with the help of new friends and seemed to be adequate for the family of three. Four children were born while living in this house; Blanch was born in October of 1887, Claude was born in January of 1889, Jay in September, 1890, and the fifth child, Maggie May was born on Dell's birthday, May 24, in 1892.

After the birth of their fifth child, Burt realized that his family had outgrown their two-room sod house.

On trips to Haigler, he passed through an attractive small station called Laird and purchased a 200-acre tract of land on the south edge of this little town where a branch of the Republican River crossed his acreage.

Burt thought this land would be favorable for raising wheat, corn and other grains, as well as beets, potatoes and alfalfa. The hills on the south had streams and good grazing grass for cattle and horses. There were even rocky cliffs hiding a spring. A year later he purchased an additional 160 acres of choice land three miles south of Laird.

Burt had studied architecture at Oberlin Conservatory while in Ohio. He thought there would be less wind resistance in an octagonal shaped house and Dell, suffering from lilapsophobia (fear of tornadoes), thought this was a welcome plan. Burt and Dell designed and built the new house with walls of rock and cement in 1892. They wanted to be certain that no cyclone would damage their home. The family moved into their new home in 1893.

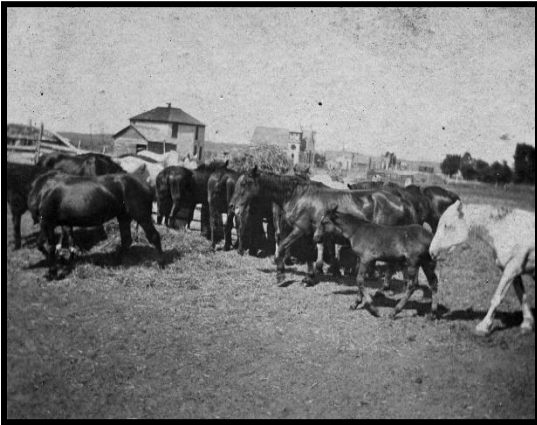


**Family outside the home circa 1910**

On entering the front door on the north, there were three choices...straight ahead up the stairs where there were four bedrooms, to the left was the parlor and a bedroom, to the right was the dining room and kitchen. Later a bathroom and running water were added.

The octagon house was not originally built with the "widows walk" top as shown in the picture to the left nor did it have the roof overhang surrounding the top of the first floor, they were added later. They moved into their home in 1893.

Tragedy struck one day, when a spark from the Prentice house chimney set a haystack on fire. The fire jumped to the new 140-foot-long barn, sheds, corrals and 330 tons of hay, burning down everything in its path. Thankfully, none of the livestock were injured. Prentice was insured for \$1,850 but his policy was issued by one of the mutual frauds and he never received a penny. The loss was a heavy one, but he replaced the destroyed property with new buildings as soon as possible.



#### **Horse behind Prentice home and outbuilding and windmill**

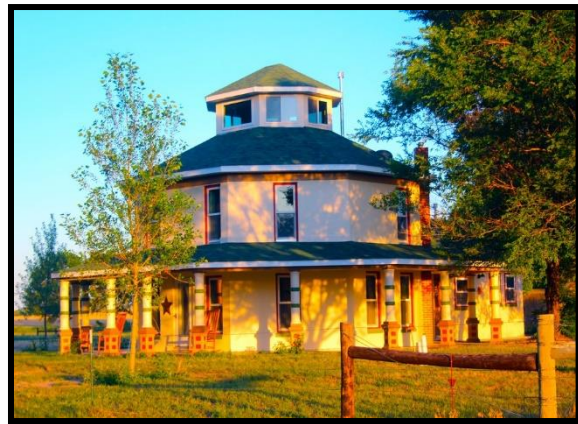
Burt kept around 600 head of cattle, 20 horses and 200 hogs every season. On his home ranch northeast of Wray, he kept calves and 120 cattle that he was preparing for market. Mr. Prentice used this original 480 acres strictly for pasture.

Dell gave birth to twins, Floyd and Nellie in 1894, while Burt had two granaries built between the house and the river and stood about a foot from the ground on rock pillars. The space underneath was a favorite hiding place for laying and setting hens.

Harold was born a year and one half after the twins and was child number eight. About the same length of time later the ninth and last child named Zella was born. She was named after Zella Weaver of Wray.

Idellah Prentice died of Typhoid Fever on October 8, 1908. She had been ill for nearly a month and was being treated by Dr. McGill and a special nurse from Wray. She was just 47 years old. This left Burt with the responsibility of raising the family. Burton was killed in an automobile accident in Washington State in 1921.

Burton and Idellah Prentice started their family in 1883. Their nine children had 30 children. Those 30 children had 78 children. In 1965, there were 125 descendants of the Prentices of Laird. In the 47 years that have passed since that time, both the living and the deceased of the relatives are scattered over several states but the historical old Prentice home in Laird is still standing. It has seen many owners' come and go and is now the property of Rex and Jody Buck who have restored the beautiful octagon home.



**Restored Octagon House**



**Burton and Idellah Prentice and their family are pictured above posed in front of their octagon home in the 1920s.**

The descendants of Burton and Idellah Prentice have been holding family reunions for many years. Jay and Bessie Prentice carried on the tradition and held reunions at their home southeast of Wray. Later the reunions were held at the Laird school, which is now the Laird Community Center. The Prentice family reunion is held every two years. At the last reunion, Rex and Jody Buck, current owners of the home, graciously allowed the Prentice families to tour the octagon home now owned by Rex and Jody. The family was pleased to see that portions of the original cement wall and other features were showcased.



**Prentice family descendants pictured above in front of the Laird octagon house during the 2012 family reunion. Reunion pictures are courtesy of Marilyn Stephens, great granddaughter of Burton and Idellah Prentice.**

*Story by Dorsey Deines Sources: Marilyn Stephens; The History of Laird, CO by Bruce and Kay Prentice; East Yuma County History book; Wray Gazette special illustrated edition 1904; Ted Clark's book.*