

*Bernard & Louise Knapp*

*Family History*

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“His Shoes Were Too Big”

Brief Sketch of  
Justin Willis Knapp  
By Bernie Knapp

FROM THE FILES OF BERNARD ELDEN KNAPP

## His Shoes Were Too Big

by Bernie Knapp

In 1925, Justin W. Knapp was forced by the bad economic conditions at the time to leave his homestead near Rexburg and go looking for work. After selling off his small herd of registered Holstein cattle for a fraction of their original cost, he was able to scrape up two horse teams, two sleighs and some household belongings, and with his family make the trek to Island Park where he had been able to land a contract to haul railroad ties to the sidings from the woods where the tie hacks had hewn and piled them.

The trip north from Ashton was made in two days. The first night was spent camped at the Railroad Ranch. A sheep camp on one of the sleighs provided protection for the family as they followed a blazed trail through the woods. Occasional stops were made and an axe laid to a dead tree to keep a supply of wood for the camp stove inside.

After leaving the ranch and crossing the Snake River, most of the travel was over flat terrain covered by lodgepole pine. Lava outcroppings, some 20 feet high and several hundred feet long prevented traveling in a straight line. Someone from the tie camp had arranged to have Justin bring two horses. These had been tied behind one of the sleighs. They were turned loose to follow behind the sleighs since the snow was belly deep off the trail.

About two miles from their destination they crossed railroad tracks and followed a well-traveled sleigh route going north beside the tracks. A train had recently been along the track and the snow was pushed out from between the rails. One of the loose horses turned and walked the rails. Within a half mile they came to Warm River which the sleighs forded with no problem.

There was a trestle for the train over the stream. Justin had supposed that the loose horses would leave the railroad and follow the sleighs. One horse had a different idea and attempted to cross the trestle on the cross-ties. When the horse stepped between two of the ties with one foot, he went down, and in floundering soon had all four legs between cross-ties. He was helplessly laying on the trestle with all four legs dangling. They tried to free the horse by rolling him onto his side and pulling his legs out. The heels of his shoes caught of the underside of the ties. Then they heard a train whistle. A train was switching at the siding ahead. Justin unhooked one of the horses from a sleigh and rode on ahead.

He arrived at the siding before the train pulled out. Collecting a pair of horseshoe pinchers from the camp, he and several volunteers boarded the train and returned to where the horse was trapped. After pulling the shoes, they were successful in getting the legs out from the ties by rolling the horse on his side. They pulled him from the trestle and got him onto his feet. The train went down the track and the sleighs went on their way.

In later years cross-ties were covered with galvanized metal that creaked under the weight of man or beast crossing over it. No doubt these coverings prevented injury and discomfort not only to livestock, but wild game animals as well. Justin always supposed that this incident in '25 had something to do with the railroad covering the trestles.