

Whitford Washington Thurber

Whitford Washington Thurber was born on Christmas Day in 1830 in the vicinity of Albany, New York. His parents were Orville and Samantha Cleveland Thurber. Whitford married Mary Elizabeth Buck, known as “Eliza,” on November 19, 1853. Their first child, Orville, was born on January 8, 1855. The exact date that Whitford and his brother, George, started for Kansas is not known, but we know from the date of the following letter that they had arrived by May 15, 1856:

Dear Eliza:

I take my pen in hand again to let you know that I am well and enjoy very good health and better [*sic*] spirits than I did when I wrote the last letter. I meant to write a long letter today, but it is night before I could get at it. George brought in a deer this forenoon, and we had to take care of that then I had to get dinner and then wash and shave and a number of household chores which spoiled the day, but I will write all I can and when I see you I will make up for all in much better manner than by writing.

I like the country very well, the prairies – dry and rolling with almost instant breezes of pure fresh air. There are no marshes nor stagnant waters to breed agues.

There is some anxiety about the *slavery* question, but I think there is no need of having any trouble if a person will mind his own business, but this seems to be a dry subject to write about.

I have made five pot pies this last week and they were all good made of ducks. There is plenty of game here, I have got tired of ducks, but it is getting late and I must go to bed alone – what a dreary thing, a bed without a woman. I wonder if you miss a bed fellow as bad as I do. I hope not, but I guess I have written love letters enough for the present. Anyone would think if they were to read my letters that I was love cracked or sick, but I don’t see why I can’t write love now as well as ever . . . I remain as devoted as ever. Yours

WHITFORD W. THURBER

On August 5th, 1856, Whitford’s father, Orville, wrote the following letter to his two sons in Kansas:

Respected Children:

I take this opportunity to write a few lines to you . . . I received your letter from Kansas. I was quite surprised to hear that you and George were in Kansas, and more surprised to hear that your wife will be coming to you alone! So far it seems to me that you might of gotten a living in this country without going so far from all your family. I don’t much more expect to ever see you there, as though you were dead and buried.

I hope you will do well for yourselves. I hope you will have good luck there and do the best you can and keep out of the hands of the enemy if there is not peace yet there . . . let me know how you are getting along there and whether your wife has gotten there yet or not and how and what luck she had in going through. I think her a noble woman to come alone . . .

You wrote that it was a fine country there, if it should come in as a *free state* I would like to come there, but it is so far to come that I don’t know now as I shall ever be able to come . . . write all about the country and how the state of things there.

Remember your affectionate father,

ORVILLE THURBER

Eliza and little Orville joined Whitford a few months later on their land near Lawrence. (Section 2, Lots 1, 2, 3, & 4). Their second son, Charles F., was born on June 9, 1857, and their first daughter, Ada, was born on October 14, 1858.

Whitford’s hopes of avoiding trouble by minding one’s own business dissipated very quickly, and he became Captain of Co. H. 3rd Kansas Militia. He and Eliza, with their three children, were still living in a log cabin when Quantrill invaded Lawrence on August 21, 1863. There is great family lore connected

with that raid, Orville's daughter-in-law, Vivian Thurber, (Mrs. Elmer Thurber) wrote to Martha the following:

Whitford Thurber, Elmer's grandfather, lived with his family in a cabin on a trail running north from Lawrence at the time. A man rode along the trail calling out that Quantrill was in Lawrence with his raiders, killing soldiers and residents and burning the town.

Whitford sent his family to hide in a brushy hollow a distance from the cabin and put Orville who was a small boy on the roof to watch for horsemen to come along the trail while he prepared ammunition for his gun to try to defend the home.

They came riding past along the trail and as they passed the cabin something caused one of their horses to shy and he [*Orville*] saw something fall off the saddle to the ground. They rode on and when he went to see what had fallen he found the weapon.

It was always called "the sword" when they spoke of it, but it is a U. S. Cavalry saber, the name is on it as I remember . . . The strap that fastened the scabbard to the owner's belt had been cut and was still on it when I last saw it . . .

Love to all the family,
VIVIAN

Orville's obituary also makes reference to the raid:

He had a distinct recollection of Quantrill's raid on Lawrence. He was stationed on the top of his father's home watching for the raiders while his father, (Whitford), was molding bullets to defend the home.

Just before the birth of their seventh child, Mary, on July 8, 1869, Whitford and Eliza moved to their farm in Clinton Township on the southeast quarter of Section 31, between Rock Creek and the Wakarusa River. This quarter-section of land was purchased on February 21, 1868, and has remained in the family ever since. Three years later, on July 10, 1871, Eliza died leaving her husband with seven children to raise. The Tussey family, on the adjoining claim to the south of Whitford, had a young daughter named Alice Mary, born on August 8, 1850. Family lore has it that Whitford's son, Orville, had eyes for Alice Mary, who was closer to his age; but Whitford must have been more persuasive, for on April 18, 1873, (two years after Eliza's death), when Whitford was then 42 and Alice Mary 23, the two were married. Of this second marriage, four more children were born, two of whom died in infancy and are reportedly buried on this farm.