

“Alice” and Raymond Graff Family

This article is based upon information originally prepared by Lloyd Graff for inclusion in the Dalton’s Heritage history book published in Dalton in 2002, and supplemental information from Lyle Graff.



Proud father Herman Martin holds his daughter Clara Alice, the first girl to be born in Dalton. Picture circa 1910.



“Alice” Martin at age 18 in 1927.

Clara “Alice” Martin was the first girl born within the town limits of Dalton. She was born in March 1909 to Herman and Mary Martin, who had moved to Dalton just a year before from Bancroft, Nebraska. Alice graduated from Dalton high school in 1925 and soon took a job as a telephone operator with the Dalton telephone company which operated out of the house of J. C. Carley.

Raymond August Graff was the first member of this pioneer family to move to Dalton in 1928. He came from Seward, Nebraska where his father had been a pioneer farmer. Raymond chose Dalton because he had been awarded the franchise for John Deere tractors and implements. He established Graff Implement Company in 1929. Over the years, he added a Texaco fuel station to his business and an automobile dealership. As the business grew, Raymond called upon his brother Elmer for help. Elmer Graff, moved to Dalton in 1932 and became manager of parts and service. In 1935, the Graff brothers purchased a farm east of Dalton and their father, Frederick Graff, moved to Dalton to operate the farm.

While on duty as telephone operator, Alice asked for “number please” from the incoming ring, she heard the voice of Raymond Graff, the new businessman in town. She was intrigued by the deep, smooth voice, and wanted to meet the man to whom it belonged. She decided to personally hand-carry the Graff Implement telephone bill for the month directly to Raymond at his business. The direct approach of the attractive telephone operator impressed Raymond. They married in Dalton in September 1930.

The Graff Implement building, located on the west side of Highway 385, was destroyed by fire in 1942, but the business was reestablished in the building that is now Dalton’s fire station. The implement business was sold in the mid-1950s.

During World War II, Raymond was not eligible for military service. But he found a way to serve. He and Alice moved to the Army’s Sioux Ordnance Depot located between Dalton and Sidney, where Raymond served as manager of civilian personnel and supervised the establishment and management of a 500 unit trailer camp to house civilian employees.

Following the War, they returned to Dalton where Raymond established the Graff Agency insurance business and operated it until his retirement in 1970. The agency was located in the building that is now the Dalton post office, and is still owned by the Graff family.

Raymond was the 1964 Colonel of Ft. Sidney Days, received the AkSarBen Good Neighbor Award in 1966, and helped establish the Rural Electric Cooperative in Cheyenne County. He was active in community affairs, particularly the Lions Club where he participated regularly in the Dalton club, was a district governor, and attended many Lions International conventions. He was a former Dalton fire chief, and was active with the Boy Scouts, the Dalton Fall Festival, and the Cheyenne County Fair.

Alice did the bookkeeping for the Graff Implement Company and the Graff Insurance Agency. Alice was also active in supporting club, Boy Scout activities and the Fall Festival. She always entered her well-known beet pickles in the festival fair and she won first prize so often she finally stopped entering out of embarrassment. Funny thing—she didn't even like pickled beets. Raymond and Alice were active in the Dalton Presbyterian Church where Alice held church offices and regularly helped with the Vacation Bible School. Alice, influenced by her Martin family's enjoyment of music, played the piano regularly, and sang and whistled as she went about her housework.

With the exception of their war years at the Sioux Ordnance Depot, Raymond and Alice lived their lives in Dalton. Both died in Dalton, Raymond in 1978 and Alice, at the age of 75, in 1984. They are buried in the Dalton cemetery. Raymond and Alice had two sons, Lloyd born in 1933 and Lyle born in 1941. Both grew up in Dalton and graduated from Dalton high school. Lloyd worked in the broadcast media and advertising business and now lives in California. He and his wife Elizabeth have four children. Lyle had a career in the computer industry and now lives in Denver. He and his wife Ruby have two children.



Alice and Raymond Graff in Dalton, 1956.

