

RUMORS, HISTORY AND TRIVIA

FLYING X RANCH

Excerpts from conversations with Owen McGill, Summer, 1982.

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The existing ranch is a combination of several homesteads that were purchased over many years by Owen McGill and his father, Thomas A. McGill. Prior to the adoption of the Taylor Act of 1937, large ranch parcels were not necessary, because cattle were grazed in open range. The Taylor Act added restrictions, leases and fees for grazing on government lands. When the ranchers had to pay lease fees and acquire lease able sections, they started to accumulate more property and fence it in.

The McGills started the current main ranch house area with its purchase by Tom McGill from George Brandon. George Brandon had acquired the property by marrying the widow of the previous owner, Arthur Dover. The following is a list of the other original homesteads. Please refer to the accompanying map for approximate locations. (Not available when uploaded)

HOMESTEADS

1. Margaret Emory: The foundation is still visible at this home site on the creek. The log house was dismantled by Tom and Owen McGill and rebuilt for use as a neighborhood school house. The structure is still standing near the entrance to the ranch at the junction of Halleck Creek trail.

2. "Uncle" Dick Padget: The neighbors all referred to Dick Padget as "Uncle". He apparently provided a lot of the local color. Being a civil war veteran, he enjoyed telling tales to the delight of the neighborhood children. At one time he found an Indian peace pipe near the house. The pipe was traced to stone found only in Pipestone, Minnesota.

The cabin is still standing, however it deteriorated quickly when the cattle use it for their shelter. Recently, several ranch members fenced in the cabin, cleaned up the fallen trees and braced up the collapsed wall of the bunk-house addition.

When the Padget's lived there, the walls were covered with white muslin and oriental rugs covered the dirt floors. They had one child, a daughter who died of diabetes at the age of seventeen.

3. Harry Yaunt: Harry Yaunt was a scout and miner. His homestead is at the base of the abandoned copper mines. He is remembered for having two bear hides nailed to the side of the barn.

4. Herman Goldsmith: The remnants of the barn are still there from the homestead near the swing gate. The McGills used the building as an equipment shed.

5. Arthur Dover/George Brandon/Tom McGill/Owen McGill: The current ranch house was built by Owen and Henrietta in the 40's. The cottonwoods were planted by Tom McGill. The small

house in the horse pasture was built as the school teacher's residence. The harsh winters dictated that if your children were to receive an education, the instructors had to live on the premises.

6. Charlie Sommer: The foundation and rock fence walls are still visible near the picnic area on Halleck Canyon trail.

7. "Old" Frank Chadwick: This homestead was located under the grove of Cottonwood near the road that passes between Halleck Canyon and Cottonwood Draw.

8. Harry Chadwick, Frank Chadwick's son: The apple groves from this homestead are still producing.

9. Krause (or Crowse): Nothing of significance was remembered about that family--including the spelling of their name.

10. Ted Harris/Agnes McGill Turney: This homestead was originally built by Ted Harris and later occupied by Owen's sister Agnes and her husband.

11. Tom Harris: Portions of this cabin and old catch pens are still standing in a beautiful location near the old sawmill.

12. Simmerlee: This homestead is on a high plateau facing the Bluegrass Ridge. It is almost straight east of the teepee rings. Many artifacts still remain, including parts of the structures and the family dump site. Simmerlee raised potatoes in a field that is now Hanchett Lake. The earth and stone hut to the west of the lake was built for potato storage not as a shepherd's hut, as rumored.

13. "Two Mexicans": The cabin was built on land that had been given to the Union Pacific Railroad. The railroad had to show that the land was being occupied in order to retain ownership. It was common practice for the railroad to hire people to live on their property for that purpose. The McGills didn't know much about the people other than they were hired to live there.

The west end (upper plains) was the last parcel to be added. It was part of the Two Bar Ranch when Owen and Henrietta purchased it in the 40's.

RUMORS AND TRIVIA

The Halleck Canyon Trail was the route used by the cavalry to move troops between Fort Laramie and Fort Halleck. Fort Halleck was located at the base of the hills on the northwest side of the Wheatland Reservoir. Apparently the route is still there, but not passable by vehicle.

The McGills have found several interesting artifacts left behind by the army. Tom McGill unearthed a beautiful saber and sheath while digging a post hole in the 20's or 30's. Owen has collected chains, casings, and miscellaneous tools. An interesting sidelight is that Tom McGill obtained Tom Horn's saddle, which is still in Owen's possession.

The large boulder near Wallace Lake was inscribed with axle grease and stated "John C. Reed, Oct. 3, 1867". It is assumed that John C. Reed was a cavalryman. The rock mounds that are in line from the top of the saddleback ridge, south of Wallace, down to Wallace, were investigated by an

archeologist under the hire of the McGills. Although a definite purpose was not determined, it was suggested that the piles were somehow related to the directional markers for the big "Medicine Wheel" in Montana/Wyoming. The construction of the piles was determined as pre-white man" due to the age dating of the moss.

The west end has many interesting sites. At the east base of the Bluegrass Ridge are several teepee rings left from the Indian campsites. It was thought that the Indians were part of the Shoshonies, however, I have not heard anything that would suggest a positive identification.

The neat rock piles on the bluff north of the ridge were rumored to be some sort of Indian markers or unmarked graves. Actually, Owen McGill allowed a miner to dig in that area and the rock piles are simply "tailings". Owen said that he never really understood what rock that fellow was looking for.

In the southwest corner of the ranch, there is a creek bed that was a source of flint. Arrowheads, spears, and chippings of this flint can be found all over the ranch.

Guide Rock was named by the cavalry and used as a guide marker for the troops. In the center of the formation is a chimney that exits to the top. It is said that the draft up the chimney is strong enough to lift the hat right off your head.

The sawmill (in Sawmill Canyon) was owned and operated by a consortium of neighbors: Tom McGill, Dodge, and Palmer. The lumber was generally produced for their own purposes and not as a commercial business.

It has been rumored that one day Owen McGill woke to see a whole tribe of Indians camped out his bedroom window. In actual fact, the Indian encampment at the base of Gold Peak took place in August of 1908 when George Brandon still owned the ranch. Owen wasn't even born until 1918. The Indians were being moved by the army to a reservation and did not stay long.

Owen also related a couple other anecdotes. He remembered fondly the day that a rat came up through the floor boards in the school house. The teacher saw the rat and threw a textbook at it to kill it. When asked about his recollection of the dust bowl years, he remembered that it seemed significant that those were the years of the mildest winters. Also, Owen has always used the N brand. He inherited it from his grandfather and intends to pass it on to his grandson.