

## FACTS & HISTORY OF THE

### “McGILL RANCH”

**This document was prepared October 8, 1990, by the Owen McGill family.**

Word of mouth conversations and time seem to have a way of getting the true facts contorted. Some of this history has been recorded in the Wyoming Archives, and these facts are written in hopes of clarifying misconceptions and rumors of the past history of the McGill Ranch. Our family has been very proud of this ranch and there has been a lot of history involved in its development over the years. As of 1990, the McGill family has been in this part of Albany County for one hundred and twenty-two years.

This ranch was started by Arthur Dover, who was born in England and came of the United States in 1880. He come directly to Cheyenne and on north to Chugwater, where he hired out to the Swan Land and Cattle Company which was better known as the “Two Bar”. This brand was made with two parallel bars branded on the left ribs. Their cattle ranged in an area from the Nebraska line to Hanna, Wyoming. Being a cowboy and passing through the Laramie Range with roundups, Arthur Dover decided on settling at this location on Halleck Creek. He settled on the ranch in 1886, and married Bessie Goldsmith shortly after. George Brandon acquired the property when he married the widow of Arthur Dover. The big Cottonwood tree that stands in the barnyard was planted by Arthur Dover in 1888 - 1890. Their only son, Ned Dover, was born in 1889, and when he was five or six years old, he got a pocket knife for Christmas. Being a typical boy, he had to try it out on the small Cottonwood tree, which was near the front door of their house. The tree was a little too big for him to cut off, so he whittled the bark off where it was easy to reach. It died from there on up, but the bottom portion continued to grow. That is what makes this tree branch out so close to the ground. This tree is now recognized as the largest Cottonwood tree in Wyoming by the Society of American Forestry.

Tom McGill bought the ranch, which at that time consisted of 1,080 acres, from George Brandon in August, 1908. Some of the original buildings were washed away by a big flood in 1898. The wooden barn, which is the oldest standing building, was built by Tom McGill in 1916. The lumber was hauled from the head of Palmer Canyon, which is west of Wheatland, with four-horse teams. The main ranch house, which was built in 1886 and added onto a number of times over the years, was torn down in 1949. It was replaced that same year by the McGill's. Tom McGill filed on an additional homestead, joining the ranch on the south side, in 1916. This is the fallen-down log building about one quarter of a mile south from the ranch house on the main road into the ranch. This building, which was originally Margaret Emery's homestead, was originally located about one-half mile north of the Blue Grass in the Emery pasture. It was moved to its present location by team and wagon. Moving a log building, in those days, was done by dismantling the logs one at a time and marking each log. The logs were then loaded lengthwise onto a wagon, hauled to the new sight, and reassembled according to the log markings. This building was later used for a school house. Nora McGill, Tom McGill's wife, filed on a piece of land, known as a dessert claim (similar to a homestead at that time), on the northwest corner of the ranch.

Dick and Josephine Padget homesteaded about one-half mile south of the Blue Grass on Halleck Creek. This old rock/log house is still standing. He was a Civil War veteran, and later, in this area, he freighted from Old Rock Creek to Fort Fetterman, Fort Laramie, and Deadwood, South Dakota. After that, he owned and operated a bar in Old Rock Creek, east of the present town of Rock River. He sold his homestead ranch to Charlie Boyd, and Charlie Boyd then sold it to Tom McGill.

To correct a rumor, the old house had wooden floors instead of dirt; and it was said that the floors had been covered with Oriental rugs, which is not right. I am sure no one in this area in those days ever heard of an Oriental rug. I never heard about Dick Padget finding an Indian peace pipe either. The crossing on the Blue Grass north of the "Padget Place", the crossing that Rudy Proctor called "Rudy's Crossing", was known for over ninety years as the "Padget Crossing". This crossing was used between the Halleck trail and the Slate Creek road north of Squaw Mountain. The "Padget Crossing" has a lot of history and people from miles around were familiar with it.

Harry Yaunt was a Civil War scout, hunter, and prospector. His homestead was at the base of Yaunt Mountain, which has the abandoned copper mines on it. These mines were worked around 1900. Tom McGill saw two bear hides that Harry Yaunt had nailed on the side of his barn in 1908. "Yaunt's Peak", a large mountain near the southeast corner of Yellowstone Park, was named after Harry Yaunt.

Herman Goldsmith's homestead was about a mile and a half down the creek from the main ranch house on Halleck Creek. The remains of this house can still be seen. A big flood in 1898 that caused a four foot depth of water in the house washed part of it away. Herman Goldsmith was the father or brother of Mrs. Arthur (Bessie) Dover Brandon. (We are not sure which.)

The Charlie and Mina Sommers' homestead was on the first meadow to be seen when entering the ranch. This meadow was first plowed with a walking plow and was leveled with a Boxelder tree being dragged behind a team of horses. The buildings were on the north side of the creek at the junction of Halleck Canyon and Tower Canyon. The rock foundation of the house is still visible. At the time the McGill Ranch was sold to the Flying X Ranch, a large rock wall, which was part of the barn, was still standing. It was later torn down and put in the creek to make a dam for a fishing hole. It was one of the historical landmarks of the ranch. One of the children of Charlie and Mina Sommers' was born on this ranch and named "Halleck Sommers" after Halleck Canyon in which they lived.

Frank and Lena Chadwick's homestead was located at the grove of Cottonwood trees where the road passes between Halleck Canyon and Cottonwood Draw in Halleck Canyon. There is still a grove of apple trees down next to the creek from where the ranch buildings were. Frank Chadwick was always known as "Old Shad", and his place was always referred to as the "Shad Place". In his early days, he was a cowboy who rode with some of the old cattle trail herds. "Shad" told about one time when he was with a big trail herd north of Cheyenne. They had about three thousand head of steers that were strung out, one behind the other, for several miles. This was in the spring of the year and a terrible blizzard hit them. The cattle froze to death, standing in their tracks, with the snow drifted around them. He came back in the summer when the snow had thawed and the cattle were still standing in their tracks in the long trail herd, just as he had left them. After he told something like this, he would say "Nobody ever believes "Old Shad"! There were numerous prospect holes on the Chadwick place, all of which were dug by him. Ben Chadwick, a son of Frank Chadwick's, took up a homestead about one-half mile above the "Painted Rock". There are no signs of his buildings remaining.

Halleck Canyon has a lot of historical significance. In the early 1860's, the Indians were attacking wagon trains and causing trouble. The United States government needed a trail to move troops from Fort Laramie to For Halleck, which was located at the north end of Elk Mountain. This canyon was in a direct line between the two forts. Jim Bridger was one of the men who helped establish this trail. It was used extensively from 1862 to 1866 by the United States government and by freighters for some time afterwards. There is a big rock known as "Painted Rock" along side of this trail above the "Shad Place" that had "John C. Reed, October 3, 1863" painted on it. This is extremely

dim now. There has been a good deal of effort made to try to find out who “John C. Reed” was through the United States military records, but nothing has been found. A young cavalry man from a regiment in Ohio kept a diary of his experiences in this area, a good many of which were on the Fort Halleck Trail. He told of encounters with the Indians and men freezing to death from exposure on the trail. Another good account of this trail is given in Dr. Finrock’s Diary located in the Wyoming Archives. He was a doctor at Fort Halleck in the 1860’s. There was supposed to have been an Indian massacre on this trail, but we do not believe this to be true, since some of the descendants of the people involved know nothing about it. Billy Owens surveyed the road across Albany County through Halleck Canyon in 1890. Some of the old stones with the markings on them are still visible. On August 10, 1898, Billy Owens was the first man to climb the Grand Teton Peak. “Mount Owens”, the second highest peak of the Tetons, was named for him. Emma Matilda Lake in the Grand Teton National Park was named for his wife.

Across Halleck Creek, south of the “Painted Rock”, there is a “trail” leading from the creek to a pass on top of the ridge. Twenty or more piles of rocks are located along this “trail”. No one has a definite answer as to who piled these rocks, or why. From the way the moss has formed on these rocks, it is evident that they were piled hundreds or thousands of years ago. There are several of these “trails” in this area. There is one over the top of the Wheatland Tunnel and across the Laramie River that can be followed for at least two miles.

The old dipping vat on the lower end of Mill Creek, about one-half mile from the Blue Grass, is still very visible. There is an old log cabin, a boiler room, the vat, draining pens and some corrals. It is located on the boundary line between the McGill Ranch and Dodge’s “96” Ranch. During the early ranching days, cattle scabies was very bad in this country and killed a lot of cattle. This dipping vat was used for dipping for scabies and was built by Tom McGill and Tom Dodge in 1932. The biggest part of the scabies epidemic was nearly over around this time. We still have occasional isolated outbreaks of scabies in Wyoming.

Nothing is left of the Tom Harris Place except an old fallen down pole toilet and a caved-in cellar. This is just above the old saw mill in Hay Draw. Years ago, Dodge’s put up hay in this canyon and that is how it got it’s name. The “saw mill” should not be included in the ranch history as it was never part of the McGill Ranch, or the present Flying X Ranch. It has been part of the Dodge “96” Ranch for the last sixty or seventy years.

The “Simmerlee” homestead is where the old potato cellar still stands. Mr. Simmerlee, known as “Old Sim”, was an old prospector that dug many prospect holes around the country. He had a large potato field along the creek northeast of this cellar. The potatoes were stored in this huge cellar, and later freighted with team and wagon to old Rock Creek for sale to the Union Pacific Railroad. Just across the Blue Grass to the east there is a spring known as the “Shot Gun” Roundup, an association made up of cattle ranchers from many miles around who gathered their cattle in the fall to be taken to their ranch for the winter. The range land was all open at that time, and the Shot Gun Roundup wagon covered all of the north end of the Laramie Plains, covering an area between Guide Rock, Bosler, Medicine Bow, Shirley Basin, and Laramie Peak.

The location of the Mexican homesteads was always known as the “Mexican Crossing”. Two Mexican shepherders from New Mexico took up these homesteads and sold them to the Two Bar. These homesteads were acquired from the United States government as all homesteads were. The Union Pacific Railroad had nothing to do with homesteading.

It has been mistakenly stated that Indians dug a very large hole on the west end of the Blue Grass Ridge thousands of years ago as a flint quarry for their arrowheads and tools. However, this is not true. This granite rock hole was dug in the 1960's with front-end loaders and dynamite and the rocks were hauled to rip-rap the dike on the Wheatland Reservoir.

It has been said that the McGill's have Tom Horn's saddle. This is not true. McGill's know nothing about this saddle, or where this rumor could have started.

It has taken over forty-five people taking up homesteads and desert claims to put this ranch together. There is one hundred and three miles of outside and cross-fence on this ranch. These fences were all built with shovels, crowbars and lots of blisters and hard sweat. Kerosene lights, wood stoves, water from the creek and outdoor plumbing were only a few of the other hardships of the people who settled the West. The McGill Ranch was no exception!