

# *Pioneer History of Soapstone Prairie*



*Suzy Kiding*



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## *Acknowledgements*

Many voices have been crucial in telling this story.

The first of our storytellers is unnamed, and I imagine his dark eyes are mysterious and his dialect contains more hand and body motion than tongue. He is thin, but strong. An adult of 14 years, he stands about 5' 3" with dark skin, relatively little body hair except for a thick black mane which hangs matted to the small of his back. He is clothed in bison skin with a "kit" or pouch at his side.

He has come with his family to an area on Soapstone Prairie strategically centered between Canada and South America, following the migratory trails of the North American. His ancestors have been journeying to this mid-winter camp for tens of thousands of years. He has selected a spot for his family in a flat draw overlooking an immense valley. He and others of various tribes have not only worked as a unit to hunt the Ice Age bison, but spent time socializing, trading, storytelling, creating alliances, and celebrating. Their domed structures clustered in groups of five or six, with a mile or so buffer between each tribe, will be rolled up tomorrow as his band prepares to move south and west again. Others will travel north and east. His vision rests on the camps scattered below. The sun has set early and intermittent campfires light the basin below.

The hunt was successful and with the reward of bison meat and hide for his Folsom family, he gives little thought to the fluted point left behind in the vertebrae of the *Bison antiqua* which had been cornered in a wet, cold, swampy arroyo a day before. But his tale is epic and one that reverberates through history.

In 1924, three amateur artifact hunters from Fort Collins, Judge Claude Coffin, Major Roy Coffin, and C. K. Collins, discovered a similar spearpoint at Soapstone Prairie. During the excavation by the Smithsonian Institution twelve years later, the ancient fluted point was discovered by a young Loren Eisely. This gave archaeologists the proof they needed to determine that humans had occupied this land during the Ice Age. Previous to this discovery, scientists were sure that humans had not been in North America for more than 2,000 years. This was riveting and excavation leader, Dr. Frank Roberts was dumbfounded. But the evidence before him solidified the existence of humans hunting, camping, and traveling through this area at least 10,000 years earlier. The archaeological dig location, now known to the world as the Lindenmeier Excavation Site is named after the ranchman who owned the land at the time of the dig and discovery, William Lindenmeier, Jr. The ancient hunters, flint knappers, bead workers, and storytellers who camped here so long ago are called the Folsom people. With more than 5,000 artifacts found that date back to the Pleistocene, Soapstone Prairie is the largest Folsom people site in North America.

The ancient Paleo-Indian hunter unassumingly left behind the beginnings of this story thousands of years ago, and many others have passed on evidence of their lives at Soapstone Prairie, and continue the story to the present. During my journey into the history of Soapstone Prairie Natural Area, a collection of extraordinary people has charitably offered insight into the exciting past. Census records, historical newspaper articles, history books, novels, land deeds, maps, historical postcards, hand written letters, manuscripts, museum and college archives, as well as the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery's phenomenal work with the Soapstone Prairie Natural Area Oral History Project, and the countless interviews with historians, college professors, teachers, authors, ranchers, and descendants of homesteaders have given me the tools to accurately tell this larger-than-life tale.

The following individuals are descendants of homesteaders, ranchers, historians, and authors and have generously shared their knowledge and insight into the history of this beautiful and mysterious area. Their close connection to Soapstone Prairie and their generosity in sharing so much information is deeply appreciated.



Bear descendant, Cathy Vlasak, takes a rest from the day's activities at the site of Soapstone Springs school. Her mother, Evelyn Bear, was the last recorded student to attend the school before it was abandoned; *courtesy Suzy Riding*

Bear family descendants, Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr, and Jack Fenton, were interviewed several times at the location of their family's old homestead in the center of Soapstone Prairie. Through their stories and hundreds of family letters, postcards, and photos, the cantankerous Ray Bear, his quiet brother Bert, and hard-working Lettie and George Bear, Sr. are resurrected and their lives rekindled.

Renee and Cathy hadn't visited the site since 1961 when the aging Bear brothers moved to Fort Collins. When the two sisters and their cousin first set eyes on the aging homestead at Soapstone Prairie during the interview, it was with a mix of wide-eyed wonderment and confusion. The original home, circa 1919, which their grandfather had built by hand, the stone structure where Ray and Bert kept their homemade choke-cherry wine, and the various barns and stables looked the same. However, the landscape itself had altered tremendously. The loess, sand, and silt that make up the soil had eroded creating deep arroyos where once stood cattle corrals used for branding. In the lush garden of their memories, the Bear's harvested potatoes, beans, tomatoes and other produce, now stands a field a brome and cheat grass.

Cathy and Renee's mother, Evelyn Bear was the last student to attend the Soapstone Springs School. The students were relocated to the Waverly School. Their grandfather, George Washington Bear, Sr., was the president of the Soapstone Springs school board. Cathy says that their mother used to boast to other children that her father was "The President."

Robert and Dorothy Sandmann first learned of this project from articles in the Loveland Reporter-Herald and Fort Collins Coloradoan newspapers in response to my press releases. Through Bob and Dot, the mystery surrounding one prominent homestead and the remarkable story of another were unveiled.

Bob's mother, Helen Thompson, along with her twin sister Ellen, were the last people to take their first breath on Soapstone Prairie in 1926. Their mother, Martha, raised seven children and occupied two homesteads on the land. Her first home with husband Nelson Guy is visible to visitors near the entrance to the natural area. Many questions are asked about the crumbling structure that greets guests but relatively little information was known about the structure and the people who occupied it. Martha's additional home, which she shared with her second husband John Thompson, is located on the southern end of Soapstone Prairie where four of her children were born. Martha was the embodiment of the strong homesteading woman. She gave birth to eleven children, buried four of them, and married twice, while managing both a prairie home and a house in Fort Collins. In 1928, economic conditions forced the Thompsons to auction all of their belongings and move their family to town. Only a few adobe slabs and barbed wire remain of the once busy homestead.



Bob's interest in his family's history was piqued after his retirement. The Sandmanns studied mountains of information and gathered dozens of photos to put the pieces of their story together. Fortunately for this project, the Sandmanns reached out to the City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Department and provided answers about the Guy homestead and Martha Thompson.

Bob and Dorothy spent several days at Soapstone taking photos of the homesteads and inspecting the ground where Bob's mother was born. Similar to the Bear descendants' experience, Bob felt the landscape had changed since his last visit as a young boy.



Martha and Margie's great nephew, Bob Sandmann with his wife Dorothy, stand at the exact location of the original homestead in August 2012; *courtesy Suzy Riding*. Martha and Margie Thompson with their dolls at the family homestead; *courtesy Robert and Dorothy Sandmann*

Historian, author, and local railroad expert, Ken Jessen, provided valuable insight into the history of railroad activity in and around Soapstone Prairie. Ken was just as excited to be a part of this project as we were to have him on board. Colorado State University Associate Professor of Anthropology, Dr. Jason Labelle and an enthusiastic maintenance crew located and resurveyed the original 135-year-old rail bed of the Colorado Central Railroad. Jessen provided a historical outline of the surveying and laying of the rail, and identified the key players in its development.



Ken Jessen in 2012 with Colorado Central RR spike. Jessen exclaims, "I've been waiting 40 years to do this!"; *courtesy Suzy Riding.*



Left to right: Bert Bear, Joe Roman and Ray Bear; *courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton*

In 1906, an Italian immigrant named Antonio Romano moved his small family from Boulder, Colorado, where he was working in a brickyard, and filed a claim in the southeast section of Soapstone Prairie. Antonio and his wife Mary raised seven children there. Their children continued to live near their birthplace becoming successful ranchers, farmers, and one of the most influential families in the area. Keith Roman, a grandson of Antonio, with his wife Myrna still live in the area. The Roman family is the constant in the Soapstone story. At least four of the Antonio Romano sons worked for the Warren Livestock Company which ran tens of thousands of head of sheep and cattle on the land. One of the sons served as equipment superintendent on the company board and Keith's father, Joe (Angelo), worked as a ranch foreman. In the 1960s and 70s, the Romans began purchasing property at Soapstone Prairie, which they sold to the City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Department in 2004. No one knows Soapstone Prairie better than Keith and Myrna. They provided maps, manuscripts, and photos about the history of the Warren Livestock Company, various homesteaders, and other stories of the characters who lived here. Their assistance has been invaluable.

Cousins Bill Vigor and Charles Lindenmeier are the last two living grandsons of William Lindenmeier, Jr. Their great grandfather and grandfather's colorful history, along with their name being associated with one of the most famous archaeological excavations in the world, made the oral history interviews an honor and a historical event in itself. Both are in their eighties now. The cousins provided crucial information regarding the homesteads, ranching, and the 1936-1940 Smithsonian Institution excavation. Charles Lindenmeier provided descriptions of excavation leader Dr. Frank Roberts, related what it was like at the famous dig, and told of subsequent conversations with Roberts including a confession from the famous archaeologist that his inability to locate a Folsom body on Soapstone Prairie had haunted him his entire life. Lindenmeier added that he remains optimistic for future archaeologists.

One of the most compelling stories for the project came about auspiciously. On a very early Saturday morning in October 2012, a man who had been a resident of the Soapstone Prairie area his entire life, got in his Chevy pickup and drove north on Rawhide Flats road until he couldn't drive anymore. Whether motivated by an unseen force or the knowledge that I was working on writing about the history of the land where he grew up, he had a story to tell and he wanted someone to listen. He told Natural Areas Department staff that he wasn't quite sure why he decided to drive to Soapstone Prairie that day. He said he felt like he was led there. This man, just shy of 90 years of age asked to be unnamed and related an experience that occurred 80 years ago when he was only eight years old. At an intersection southeast of the natural area this man, during the Great Depression, and his mother and siblings brought food to another family at that spot, who were just barely surviving.



“It was like I was transported back in time. I felt the same feelings of hopelessness for these people I had felt that day, and I started to cry. I went into a depression after that.” he said, “So many people up here were homeless during the Depression and they would just walk the roads and railroad tracks to get away from where they had been. The families up here, they had nothing. Absolutely nothing.” This compassionate and anonymous contributor also provided information about the Warren Livestock ranching activities and characters as well as validating that women were homesteaders in the ponderosa pines in the 1930s.

All of the individuals from different walks of life were drawn to this area by the same purpose: the opportunity this land provided. Whether it was the Folsom people following *Bison antiqua* in 10,000 B.C. or an entrepreneur homesteader Nelson Guy in the 20th century, Soapstone Prairie has offered the basic needs of survival: ability to harvest or hunt food, resources for building a shelter or home, and the possibility of employment or income. Social interaction were also possible because from ancient time to 1963, Soapstone Prairie has been a place of tremendous social and economic activity even if it appears quiet today.

Many homesteaders not only worked their own land which was required by the Homestead Act, but also found employment as section hands for the railroad, dug coal mines for one or all of three prominent coal mining companies, harvested hay and drove cattle for one of the five leading ranching companies in the area, or after 1919, possibly worked as roughnecks at one of the many oil wells in the vicinity. In addition, Ordinance #14 in 1896 made the manufacture, distribution, or imbibing of alcohol within City limits illegal, “moonshining” or bootlegging” became a profitable business in towns such as Wellington, Laporte, Waverly, Cheyenne, and Bristol Miner. Several Soapstone Prairie homesteaders took advantage of the from this product and both reaped rewards and suffered its consequences.

From the Folsom people of the Pleistocene era, to homesteaders and ranchers, the picturesque landscape of Soapstone Prairie has been the backdrop of human occupation for over 12,000 years. Enormous gratitude is offered to all the historians, educators, storytellers, and homesteader descendants who made this story possible.

Welcome to Soapstone Prairie!





## Introduction to Pioneer History of Soapstone Prairie

At Soapstone Prairie Natural Area, hikers, cyclists, and equestrians enjoy miles of trails and sometimes not encounter another person throughout the day.

However, just after the turn of the 20th century, there were many families and homesteads that dotted this beautiful prairie. As night settled over the valley, one can imagine the gas lamps, lanterns, and campfires that lit up this area revealing the locations of the many dwellings. The homesteaders were a hardworking mix of immigrants, laborers, farmers, miners, and others who were seeking the same things we desire today: freedom and the pursuit of happiness in the remote wilderness. From paralyzing blizzards and devastating drought, to grasshoppers and rattlesnakes, prospective homesteaders at Soapstone Prairie were challenged by uncompromising elements. But they were determined to prove themselves on the prairie.

With the exception of just two families, all of the Soapstone Prairie homesteaders had moved on from the prairie by the late 1920s. They all demonstrated enormous courage, resourcefulness, and made sacrifices. Now, only crumbled stone and clapboard relics of homesteads remain as ghostly reminders of those who came, sometimes thrived, and those who left in desperation. The trails that recreationists use today were once routes on which homesteaders traveled to town for supplies or to sell goods, to visit a neighboring homesteader, to find work as a ranch hand or coal miner, or to run their livestock.

For contextual reference, it is also important to provide a brief history of Colorado as well as focusing on the Fort Collins, Wellington, and Bristol Miner areas. The Soapstone Prairie homesteaders lived in the Bristol Miner Precinct; however, many used Wellington, Colorado as their mailing address and considered themselves a part of the Wellington community. Additionally, the economic boom through agricultural, coal mining, and ranching in Wellington attracted homesteaders to this area from the turn of the century to approximately the 1920s.

In this book, we will:

- explore the Homestead Act of 1862 and how it affected the Soapstone Prairie homesteaders;
- meet the homesteading families and discover how these resourceful settlers used the natural resources to survive;
- understand the role of the school in the community;
- explore the varied ranching industry;
- and discover how the railroads and stagecoaches affected the settlers.



# *Homesteading*

## **Early Development of Townships and Homestead Acts**

Following the Revolutionary War, American citizens were eager to establish residency on their newly independent soil. In 1777, with the adoption of the Articles of Confederation, measurement and pricing of land was a priority. However, Congress did not have the power to raise revenue by direct taxation of the inhabitants of the United States. Therefore, the Land Ordinance of 1785 was enacted with the immediate goal to raise money through the sale of land in the largely unmapped territory west of the 13 original states that were acquired after the end of the war. Over three-fourths of the area of the continental United States ultimately came under the rectangular system of land survey.

The Land Ordinance of 1785 implemented a standardized system of federal land surveys that used starting points to divide territories into six-mile squares called “townships.” The township was divided into 36 sections, each measuring one square mile of 640 acres each. A family or individual who wanted to settle on the property paid \$1.00 per acre and had to purchase the entire 640 acres. This was often too difficult for a prospective settler and by 1800 the government had decreased the minimum purchase to 320 acres. The price increased to \$1.25 per acre, which a settler could pay in four installments. By 1854, the land purchasing system was altered again to a graduated scale that adjusted prices depending on location and desirability. Difficult-to-sell lots were marked down as low as 12 ½ cents per acre. The goal was to make land ownership attainable for all citizens (Land Ordinance of 1785, Homestead Act of 1862).

Following the Mexican-American War (1846-1848) and before the Civil War (1861-1865), four homestead bills were introduced to Congress to alleviate poverty, unemployment, and overcrowding in the eastern states. They all failed because of southern opposition. Southern states worried that anti-slavery farmers would populate the western territories. In addition, northern factory owners also feared a mass exodus of cheap labor (ushistoryscene.com n.d.).

A homesteading bill was pushed along by an eloquent and promising oration by President Abraham Lincoln on July 4, 1861. He said, "It is the purpose of our government to elevate the condition of men, to lift artificial burdens from all shoulders and to give everyone an unfettered start and a fair chance in the race of life." With the end of the Civil War and abolishment of slavery, Lincoln passed through Congress what became the Homestead Act of 1862.

With the Homestead Act of 1862, any American citizen who had never "born arms against the American government" could file an application on 160 acres of government land, if that land had been surveyed. Citizens desiring to homestead had to first file a claim at the nearest Land Office. A brief assessment of the property was made to investigate if the property was already claimed. If it was not claimed, the homesteader paid a \$10.00 filing fee and a \$2.00 commission to the Land Office agent. The homesteader was then allowed to begin the process of making good on his claim.

The first Homestead Act of 1862 claim was filed in Beatrice, Nebraska on January 1, 1863 by a settler named Daniel Freeman.



Daniel Freeman, *courtesy NPS.org* Freeman Homestead; *courtesy Legends of America.com*

Other early Acts that aided in the development of the West include:

- Timber Culture Act of 1873
- Desert Land Act of 1877
- Newlands Act of 1902
- Forest Homestead Act of 1906

Between 1900 and 1916, the United States Congress and the House Committee on Public Lands became aware that 160 acres was not enough to ensure survival in the semi-arid lands west of the Missouri River. It was estimated that one head of stock

required approximately 20 acres a year to subsist. Therefore, two additional Acts were passed:

- Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909 which increased the acreage of a claim to 320 acres.
- Stock Raising Act of 1916 which allowed 640 acres per claim to run cattle and sheep. No improvement of the land was required (Lands 1915, 488; U.S. Department of the Interior n.d.).

Department of the Interior  
General Land Office  
Form approved by Comptroller of Treasury  
March 15, 1915

## RECEIPT

No. 1401874

U. S. LAND OFFICE, DENVER, Colorado, June 30, 1915.

RECEIVED of Martha E. Guy Wellington, Colorado,  
(Name) (Address)

Twenty-two no Dollars, in connection with  
Homestead Application 189  
(Kind of application and act under which made.) SERIAL No. 021632.

Purchase money, .....	acres, at \$ .....	per acre .....	
Purchase money, excess area, .....	acres, at \$ .....	per acre .....	
Water-right charges (irrigable area, .....	acres) .....		
Building for 19 .....	on .....	acres, at \$ .....	per acre .....
O. and M. for 19 .....	on .....	acres, at \$ .....	per acre .....
Fees .....			10
Commissions <u>145.32</u> acres at <u>\$2.50</u> .....			10 90
Testimony fees, .....	words, at .....	cents per 100 words .....	
Contest fees, .....	words, at .....	cents per 100 words .....	
Transcripts of records, .....	words, at .....	cents per 100 words .....	
Interest, .....	\$ .....	from .....	to .....
		(inclusive), at .....	% .....
Surplus amount tendered .....			1 10
.....	plats .....	at \$ .....	each .....
(Check No. <u>1346 - \$1.10</u> ).		Total .....	\$22.00

*William A. Maxwell*, Receiver of Public Monies.

This Receipt is evidence only of the receipt of the amount indicated, and must be issued at the time the money is received, without regard to the subsequent allowance or rejection of the application, entry, etc., the basis of which will be a fact.  
In case of error in this Receipt, notify the Receiver of Public Monies where issued, and the Commissioner of the General Land Office, Washington, D. C.  
In writing to this land office or the General Land Office concerning the application or entry in connection with which this Receipt issued, always give the above Serial Number and the Homestead Number.



In 1915, homesteader Martha Guy paid \$22.00 for her homestead application. She paid by check to the General Land Office in Denver, Colorado; *courtesy Robert and Dorothy Sandmann*

The three Acts utilized by Soapstone Prairie homesteaders were the Homestead Act of 1862, the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909, and the Stock Raising Act of 1916.

The Homestead Act contained several requirements of a claimant in order to receive the final certificate of ownership:

- The applicant had to be at least 21 years old and head of the household.
- The applicant was required to build a residence which measured at least 10 feet by 14 feet.
- The applicant was required to live on the land for at least six months of the year.
- The applicant was required to improve the land and make a living from it.

If a settler could do all this in five years and had two to four neighbors as witnesses, they were considered successfully “proved up” and would receive a presidentially-signed land patent to proudly frame and hang on their sod, clapboard, stone, or adobe wall.



Between 1900 and 1920, 14.5 million immigrants arrived in the U.S. from primarily European countries, and comprised 15 percent of the population. After 1900, African-Americans from southern states also brought an influx of people to the western states. This boost in immigration fueled an increase in homesteading. To provide an income for their families and have the freedom to live as they wanted, settlers canvassed the plains for available land. Many individuals and families were willing to leave the only home they had known to move to a place that few of them had ever seen before. Sod, stone, adobe, and timber dwellings popped up across the western frontier. In 1913, a record 439,000 individuals filed claims under the Homestead Act on eleven million acres (Hadiya 2015; US Immigration History Statistics n.d.; Batalova 2010; Bureau 1999; National Park Service n.d.).



Soapstone Prairie homesteader Antonio Romano and family at their homestead; *courtesy of Robert and Dorothy Sandmann*

It's hard to describe the impacts that homesteading had on a new country, but 40% of applications for homesteads were completed (proved up) and 70% of homesteading occurred between 1900 and 1930 (National Park Service, Homestead n.d.).

By 1934, homesteaders had filed over 1.6 million claims on 270 million acres of surveyed government land, a tenth of all U.S. land. In Colorado alone, 108,000 claims for 4.5 million acres were filed from 1916-1917. At the height of the Soapstone Prairie claims, there were 52,720 surveyed acres in Larimer County available for homesteading (National Park Service, Homestead n.d.; Year Book of the State of Colorado 1918-1919, p. 25).



Romano homestead patent; *courtesy of Robert and Dorothy Sandmann*



Taking advantage of the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909, 600 African-American residents homesteaded a community they called Dearfield, 30 miles east of Greeley, Colorado. Today Dearfield is a ghost town; *courtesy of the City of Greeley Museums Permanent Collection*

The final recipient of a Homestead Act claim was Kenneth Deardorff, a Vietnam War veteran. Deardorff “proved up” his land and received his certificate in 1974 for 80 acres in Stony River, Alaska. The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 repealed the Homestead Act of 1862, ending the possibility for a citizen to officially “homestead” any U.S. government land (National Park Service, *The Last Homesteader* n.d.).



The last homesteader Kenneth Deardorff; *courtesy the Bureau of Land Management*

## Pikes Peak or Bust! Colorado Immigration and Homesteading Trends

In July 1858, a Georgian prospector named William Russell “panned out several hundred dollars” of placer gold at the confluence of the South Platte River and Little Dry Creek. With this discovery and another one near Idaho Springs, the following year, the Colorado Gold Rush was on. An estimated 100,000 fortune seekers traveled to Colorado in hopes of finding gold nuggets. At that time Colorado was governed under Kansas territorial laws. Desiring a territorial government closer to home, these new citizens (mostly miners, farmers, mercantile owners, and settlers) appealed to the federal government, and in 1861 the Territory of Colorado was organized. With a rapid and steady population growth, Colorado was admitted to the Union as the 38th state in 1876. The new state of Colorado offered many opportunities for those wishing to move to the west, and settlers arrived in record numbers. There was an almost 400% increase in population from the time Colorado entered statehood to the 1880s (table below). The first decade of the 20th century also witnessed a spike in population (The Colorado Gold Rush 2009; Colorado Encyclopedia Colorado Gold Rush n.d.; America’s Story n.d.).

Census reports show the population growth of Colorado from 1860 to 1918. Most of the Soapstone Prairie homesteaders entered Colorado and filed claims from 1900 to approximately 1920.

Year	Population	% Increase from previous census	% Increase for United States
1860	34,277	NA	--
1870	39,864	16.3	22.6
1880	194,327	387.5	25.5
1890	413,249	112.7	25.5
1900	539,700	30.6	20.7
1910	799, 024	48.0	21.0
1918	1,022,639	27.9	14.5

*Year Book of the State of Colorado 1918-1919, 6*

There were many reasons for immigration to the western states and Colorado specifically. Colorado was a state wide open with possibility and promise economically, politically, and socially.

### Economic Factors

- Due to livestock, mining and agricultural industries, Colorado began as a state with a platform of economic growth and wealth. The state’s constitution promoted business as a priority.



- With the success of Horace Greeley's Union Colony in the 1870s, promise of agricultural pursuits in the form of sugar beets, alfalfa, hay, oats, orchards, and other produce enticed settlers.
- Federal subsidies for railroads encouraged settlement.
- The development of irrigation increased land value.
- Although very few people actually became rich, the tales of wealth coming from the gold, silver, and coal mining operations was attractive to many.
- The stock market crash of 1873 caused unemployment for three million Americans. With the collapse of the Reading Railroad in 1893, the country suffered another major economic depression leaving 20-25% of the population in the eastern states without work. The unemployed sought opportunity in the west.



Soapstone Prairie homesteaders; *courtesy Robert and Dorothy Sandmann*

## Political Factors

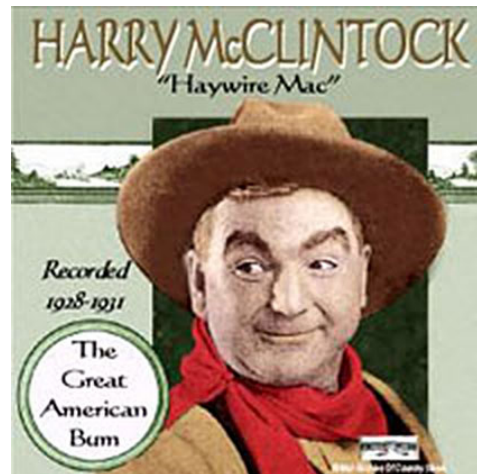
- The Homestead Act of 1862 provided an abundance of free land for settling. In 1917, there were still 14.9 million acres of Colorado land available for homesteading (Year Book of the State of Colorado 1918-1919, 25).
- Theodore Roosevelt created the Newlands Act of 1902 within the Bureau of Reclamation under the Department of the Interior. This Act established a reclamation fund for water storage, diversion, and distribution. Funds were gathered from the sale of land in 16 western states. The goal was to set aside money from the sale of semi-arid lands for the development of irrigation. This provided governmental support to a homesteader.
- The Antiquities Act of 1906 gave President Theodore Roosevelt the authority to set aside private lands for public use. Roosevelt protected approximately 230,000 acres

of public lands and created 18 national monuments. Roosevelt's proactive moves to conserve land created an urgency to homestead while land was still available.

- As a progressive state, Colorado offered women suffragists and temperance unions the freedom to voice their opinion.
- Because of the abundance of natural grasses, explorer John C. Fremont called Colorado the Great American Prairie, while William Gilpin touted it as the "pastoral gardens of the world." These words spurred prospective cattle ranchers to the area such as Charles Goodnight, Oliver Loving, John Wesley Iliff, and Francis Emory Warren.

## Social Factors

- Boosters hired by land promoters and speculators, along with newspaper publishers, touted Colorado's wealth and provided flattering descriptions of the luxurious life that could be had.
- The devastating displacement of Native Americans to reservations provided more land for settlement by European immigrants.
- The availability of free land provided women an opportunity for independence. In fact, in 1907, 18% of the homestead claims filed in Lamar, Colorado were filed by women.
- In 1897, while the nation was still recuperating from the financial collapse four years earlier, singer Harry McClintock wrote the popular song Big Rock Candy Mountain, which describes a hobo's dreams of reaching paradise. Although two states claim fame to the location of the original Big Rock Candy Mountain, a large peak in the South Platte rock climbing area of Colorado, which resembles a candy cane, has been thought to be the site McClintock sung about and may have spurred immigration to Colorado (Colorado n.d.; A Growing Nation: Westward Expansion After the Civil War n.d.; Mountain Project n.d.; Wikipedia n.d.).



Harry "Haywire Mac" McClintock, The Great American Bum; *Courtesy horntip.com*

## Larimer County Development

Larimer County lies in the north-central part of the state; its north boundary is the state of Wyoming and the western boundary is the Medicine Bow mountain range. It has an irregular rectangular outline except for the western boundary. Its length east to west along the north boundary is 64 miles, and its width is about 50 miles. Its area is 1,682,560 acres (Year Book of the State of Colorado 1918-1919, 136).

The earliest recorded inhabitants of Larimer County date to 12,000 years ago with the discovery of ancient relics of the Paleo-Indian Folsom culture unearthed at the Lindenmeier Site on Soapstone Prairie Natural Area. In the Gordon Creek area, located between the Poudre Canyon and Red Feather Lakes,, the 9,000-year-old remains of a woman were found in 1963. Indigenous tribes such as the Ute, Sioux, Northern Arapaho and the Northern Cheyenne roamed the hills and prairies of Larimer County beginning in the early 18th century. Early newspaper editor and historian, Ansel Watrous, described the occupation of the Arapaho band in the area, “As the Cache la Poudre valley seems to have been their favorite hunting grounds they spent a good part of the hunting season along the river and their tepees were familiar sights to the early explorers and emigrants. Their camping grounds were mainly on both sides of the river near the mouth of the Boxelder Creek and at or near Laporte.” Boxelder Creek is located approximately seven miles south of Soapstone Prairie. (Carl Abbot 2005, 11, 19; Watrous 1911, 15).



Poudre Canyon; *courtesy [www.mountainproject.com](http://www.mountainproject.com)*

The abundant wildlife and unique geological features of Larimer County attracted many explorers, mountain men, and trappers. In the first four decades of the 19th century, the rugged hills of the canyons, the lush river beds of the Poudre River, and the wild grasslands of the prairie were scoured by trappers and fur traders in search of pelts to sell in the east and in Europe. In 1818, fifteen Spanish soldiers under the command of Joseph Charvet traveled north from Santa Fe to investigate the Yellowstone River. The conquistadors are believed to have traveled along the foothills of Larimer County and possibly entered present day Poudre Canyon in search of gold (Sladek 2002, 34; Tresner n.d.).







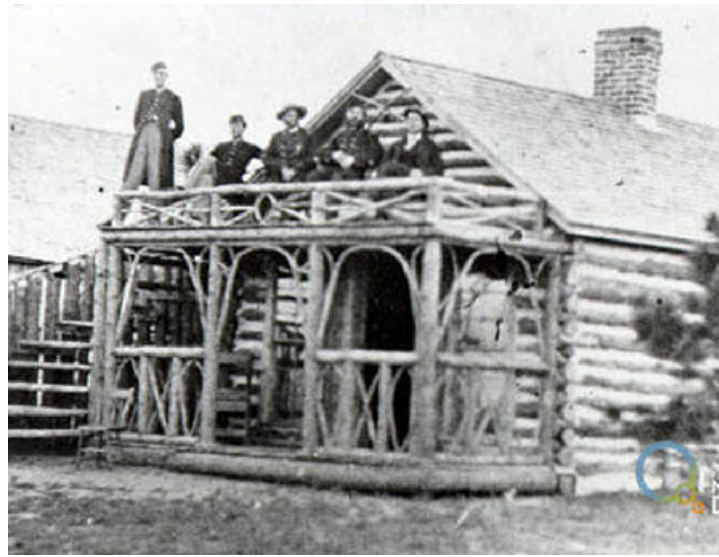
Early trapper Antoin Janis (left) and Northern Arapaho Chief Friday (right); *courtesy Fort Collins Museum of Discovery*

Through the 1858 Treaty of Fort Laramie, negotiations with the Northern Arapaho and Cheyenne tribes opened up settlement of present day Laramie County. Following the agreements at Fort Laramie (located 80 miles north of Cheyenne, Wyoming), French trapper Antoine Janis led a party south to the lush Cache La Poudre Valley. In Colona (west of present day Laporte, Colorado) Janis helped establish the first settlement in the county (Watrous 1911, 15).

By 1862 the U.S. government had established a small military post in Laporte, Colorado, along the Overland Trail. Under the command of Captain W. H. Evans, the camp was garrisoned by troops of the Ninth Kansas Volunteer Cavalry, followed by the Company B of the First Colorado Cavalry, which were replaced by the Eleventh Kansas Volunteer Cavalry. In May of 1864, when the Eleventh Kansas was ordered into active duty, companies B and F of the Eleventh Ohio Volunteer Cavalry secured the camp. The post was established to protect travelers of the stage coach, freight wagons, and settlers. Camp Collins was named in honor of a Hillsboro, Ohio attorney who was drafted into service at the start of the Civil War, Lieutenant Colonel William Oliver Collins (Watrous 1911, 57).

On June 9, 1864, two months after the Ohio troops arrived Camp Collins was destroyed in a flood. With the aid of early French-Canadian settler, Joseph Mason (Messier) a new camp location was established six miles downstream from the original camp. The new

camp had two advantages: the higher ground decreased the chance of the camp experiencing another flood and it was free of any squatter's claims. By October, the new camp was considered a permanent Civil War post and took the name Fort Collins. The 6,000-acre military fort would be bordered by today's Whitcomb Street on the west, Jefferson Street on the south, Lincoln Street on the east, and the Poudre River on the north.



Lieutenant Colonel William Oliver Collins (left) and headquarters structure at Fort Collins (right);  
*courtesy the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery*

By 1867, the fort was abandoned and most of the cavalryman had left; a handful of residents and veterans stayed. On February 3, 1873, the town of Fort Collins was incorporated. Fort Collins grew from a frontier outpost in the 1870s to a prosperous agricultural community in the 1920s on the strength of the western expansion of irrigated farming technology, the advent of the railroads, and the development of the State Agricultural College (now Colorado State University; Tresner n.d.).

Fort Collins experienced a more than 50% population increase from 1890-1900. Even more dramatic was the increase from 1900-1910 in which the town gained over 5,000 new residents. Several factors contributed to its growth: the Union Pacific Railroad and the Colorado and Southern Railroads, the success of sugar beets and other agricultural pursuits, and improved development of City utilities such as water, electricity, and telephone.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Increase</b>	<b>Change</b>
1880	1,356	--	--
1890	2,011	655	48.3
1900	3,053	1,042	51.8
1910	8,210	5,157	168.9
1910	8,755	545	6.6
1930	11,489	2,734	31.2
1940	12,251	762	6.6

*Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census*

### **Wellington, Colorado Becomes a Homesteading Destination**

Fort Collins and Wellington figured prominently in the settlement of Soapstone Prairie. Named after a Colorado and Southern Railroad traffic manager, Charles L. Wellington, the town was founded in 1902 and incorporated in 1905. Surrounded by lush agricultural farmland to the south and west, and dry-land farming to the north and east, Wellington sits in the heart of the Boxelder Valley. It is located 12 miles north of Fort Collins, Colorado (Ahlbrandt 2005).

The population index for Wellington, Colorado, recorded from 1905 to 1941, (table below), shows an increase of 112 residents from 1905 to 1906, which in part was due to the influx of German-Russian workers who arrived in the area to help harvest beets. After 1910, the population dropped by 20 inhabitants then, rose again by 100 between 1920 and 1930. The creation of the Farmers Bureau, which supported dry-land farmers in the area, and an improved irrigation system may have caused for this 1920-1930 increase.

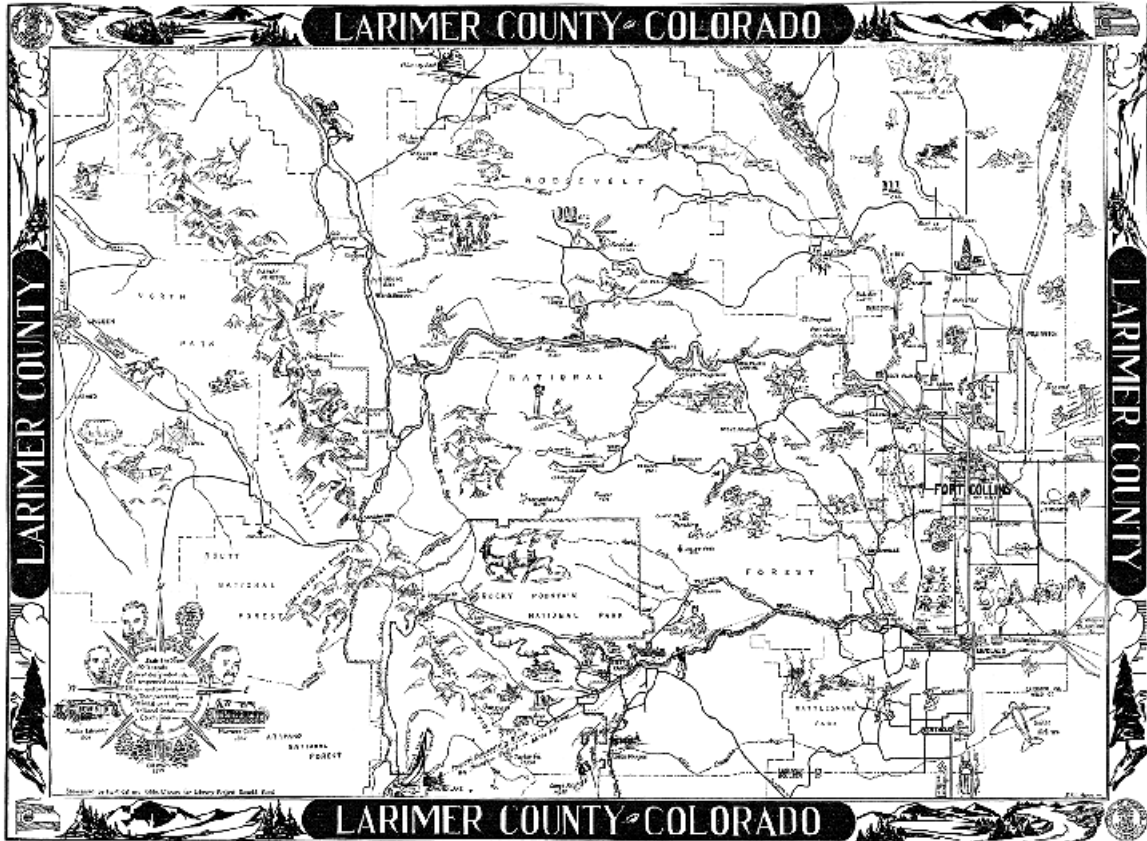
<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of residents in Wellington</b>
1905	288
1906	400
1910	459
1920	439
1930	539
1941	465

*Source: U.S. Census (Ahlbrandt 2005, 4)*



## Economic Opportunities for Homesteaders

In 1904, a year before its incorporation, Wellington advertised itself as the hub of the agricultural industry in northern Colorado in an attempt to boost its population. The rich soil of the area was adapted to raising beets, wheat, and alfalfa which were the primary sources of agricultural income for the area. With a sodbuster plow and a good four horse team, a farmer could make extra money “busting sod” at two dollars per acre and dinner, if the cook was home (Fort Collins Courier 1920; Phillips n.d., 6).



This 1930s time capsule map shows the area around Wellington and Soapstone Prairie as prime ranching and agricultural land; *courtesy Larimer County, n.d.*

Many homesteaders not only worked their own land as part of the requirements of the Homestead Act, but also found employment with the lucrative coal mining companies that existed in the area. They also harvested hay and drove cattle for the three largest ranching operations. If this wasn't enough to lure in a hopeful homesteader, Wellington also had an extensive irrigation system in place as well as governmental support for the dry-land farmer.



## Beets, Wheat, Alfalfa—Wellington's Primary Crops

In 1914, the *Fort Collins Courier* published an article titled "Wellington—A Thriving Town with a Bright Future." It touted Wellington's landscape as a utopia of agricultural and livestock industries. An excerpt from the article shows optimism and promise of a good life for farmers and stock growers and attracted others to the area.

Just twelve miles northeast of Fort Collins, at the head of the Boxelder Valley is a little town called Wellington, which, through the progressive ideas and abiding faith of its businessmen, is destined to become one of the thriving little municipalities in Colorado. Surrounded by a rich agricultural district, on the main Gulf to Coast line of the Burlington Railroad, with skilled, successful farmers keeping the land in the highest state of production, and with more land waiting for more farmers, it is bound to eventually prove one of the leading towns in this section of the state.

Surrounding Wellington are 35,000 acres of productive land all under irrigation and this land is producing big yields every year. The North Poudre Irrigation Company, has a model irrigation system, bringing water from the mountain streams of this land. In addition to this there are 40,000 acres of grazing and dry-farming land.

Sugar beet, alfalfa and grain crops are the principal crops now grown in the Wellington district. Sugar beets do especially well in this district; the record for the highest sugar content being held by a Wellington grower, who produced beets last year having a content of 23.5%, the highest percent in all Northern Colorado.

The soil and climatic conditions are especially good for the raising of alfalfa and it is grown extensively for feed for sheep and cattle. The world's record for the highest number of bushels of wheat to the acre is claimed by this district with a yield of 85.1 bushels.

Such is Wellington, Colorado in the ninth year of its existence. With all these claims—backed up by the facts—coupled with Colorado's health-giving, disease-dispelling climate, Wellington is sure to thrive, as people cannot overlook the advantages of such a town—a place to earn a good living, to make money if you have money to invest, and best of all, a pleasant place to live (Fort Collins Courier 1914).

Sugar beets for commercial purposes were first grown in northern Colorado in 1901. In the winter of 1902-03, the Great Western Sugar Company (GW) built the first beet factory in Fort Collins and began contracting out work to area farmers including those in Wellington. By the 1920s, there were five beet dumps in the area: Ripple, located west

of Waverly; Dixon, a mile north of Wellington; Buckeye, at the intersections of Larimer County Road 82 and 15; Waverly, and Wellington. Farmers in the area signed contracts with the Great Western Sugar Company for a fixed amount of production. The GW paid \$7.00 to \$12.00 a ton for beets. On average, a farmer produced 18-22 tons of beets per farm (Fort Collins Courier 1914).



Beet harvesting; *courtesy the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery*

Beet harvests began the first week of October, weather permitting. Occasionally a cold snap or snowfall would delay the start of the harvest. Schools closed for three weeks so that children could help with the work. The rural school teachers took a “beet vacation.”

The Great Western Sugar Company needed at least 9,000 acres of beets. However, 1911 proved to be a particularly dry year and farmers yielded only 6,000 acres. In response, the GW offered a \$1,000 prize for the best acreages of beets raised in the next season. In 1914, a Wellington farmer grew a beet with a record sugar content for northern Colorado. In 1926, the Great Western Sugar Company launched the “Another Ton in 1926” campaign which encouraged farmers to continue growing beets and increase the yield per acre (Fort Collins Courier 1926).

Grain production in northern Colorado first appeared in the late 1860s and 1870s. When the Lindell Mill was established in Fort Collins in the mid-1870s, wheat became a lucrative income for area farmers. Newspapers were anxious to draw in more residents and reported glowing tales of the many acres of wheat grown north of Fort Collins.

In 1909, a reporter for the local newspaper released a report regarding a group of Wellington farmers who had decided to cooperate in a fall wheat planting, rather than the spring wheat they had traditionally sown. They modeled their fall wheat program after a handful of successful farmers in the Berthoud, Colorado area. The venture paid off.

Just three years later, another article reported that Wellington claimed the world record for the highest number of bushels of wheat grown per acre (Fort Collins Courier 1914). With thousands of acres of wheat being grown north of Wellington and east of Soapstone Prairie, the Fort Collins Courier expressed its opinion that the dry land farmers of this area would become rich. Wheat farmers didn't necessarily become rich, but wheat was a crop that could withstand some wind or drought and was less labor intensive than beets that were also grown in the area at the same time (Fort Collins Courier 1922).

Alfalfa was a crop crucial to Wellington's livelihood and success. It not only provided feed for the many sheep and cattle operations in the area, but was considered unequalled as a soil enricher for beets. Alfalfa from Wellington was shipped by rail to Kentucky, Alabama, and Mississippi to use as feed. The price paid to a Wellington farmer could range from \$9.00 to \$11.00 a ton (Fort Collins Courier 1908, 1913, 1914).

### **The Importance of Water**

Of all the resources in the Wellington area including beets, grains, oil, coal, and natural gas, none was more precious than water. One of the reasons for the tremendous fluctuation in population in the area was the lack of irrigation for farms. No matter how ambitious, or hopeful or hardworking, those who did not have access to water did not succeed. Two years before the incorporation of the town of Wellington, the North Poudre Irrigation Company began plans to irrigate and provide that crucial resource to farmers (Fort Collins Courier 1903).

As Benjamin Franklin noted, "when the wells dry, we know the worth of water."

The development of the ditch system gave homesteaders and farmers hope, but it also opened up a new business venture for irrigation companies who built streams in return for the sale of shares of water. Soon, more irrigation companies began to flood the market in Wellington and northern Colorado.

An excerpt from Colorado State University archives regarding the history of the North Poudre Irrigation Company (NPIC) provides an overview of the company's development and its influence on the founding of Wellington, Colorado:

In the 1870s, Larimer County residents recognized that an irrigation canal could divert water from the North Fork Cache la Poudre River to enable cultivation of the lands north of Fort Collins. Local business owners incorporated a series of irrigation companies that formed and failed in quick succession: North Fork Irrigation Canal Company (1878), the North Poudre, Box Elder, and Lone Tree Canal Company (1879), and the North Poudre Land, Canal and Reservoir Company (1880).

The North Poudre Land, Canal and Reservoir Company used money from eastern investment companies to fund construction of the North Fork Canal (later renamed the North Poudre Canal), but in 1886 Travelers Insurance Company foreclosed on the ditch and 16,000 acres of company land used to secure the loans. F.C. Grable purchased the renamed North Poudre Land and Canal Company in 1896 but was unable to make the enterprise profitable.

Northern Colorado investors bought the partially-constructed system in 1901 and incorporated the North Poudre Irrigation Company (NPIC). The company located its offices in Greeley and increased the number of available capital stock shares, using the funds to complete the North Poudre Canal and construct several large reservoirs: Fossil Creek, Halligan, and Reservoir No. 15. NPIC also acquired higher priority diversion rights by strategically selling Douglas Reservoir to the Poudre Valley Reservoir Company and purchasing stock in the Larimer No. 2 Ditch, New Mercer Canal, and Boxelder Ditch and Reservoir Company. These improvements and the water exchanges they enabled spurred farmers to purchase company-owned land and brought about the founding of Wellington, Colorado, in 1903.

In 1912, investors again reorganized the company, which had moved its offices to Fort Collins six years earlier. They increased the number of capital stock shares to 10,000 and reincorporated NPIC as a mutual ditch company. That same year, NPIC merged with the Mountain Supply Ditch Company, originally incorporated in 1905. NPIC then took over the Box Elder Ditch and Reservoir Company in 1916, thus increasing its system substantially in a short time (Patricia J. Rettig n.d.).

In 1906, two Fort Collins businessmen, Wellington Hibbard and Myron Akin, formed the Laramie-Poudre Reservoir and Irrigation Company which brought water to 150,000 acres in Wellington. The building of the ditch was financed by stockholders and farmers at \$100.00 per share. The Laramie-Poudre irrigation system ran approximately 10 miles south of Soapstone Prairie and traveled east toward Nunn, Colorado (Fort Collins Courier, 1906, 1907; Fort Collins Courier 1907).

Unfortunately, the rain doesn't always follow the plow. At least seven weeks in June and July, 1911, yielded little or no rain. The North Poudre Irrigation Company lacked sufficient storage reservoirs to capture enough spring runoff to get through winters or to store for subsequent years. The 1920s were plagued with canal and ditch breakages which caused overflows that resulted in the loss of much-needed irrigation water and over-soaked crops in the vicinity.

With the development of irrigation in Wellington, Soapstone Prairie homesteaders were optimistic that they might receive a share of the water rights and therefore be



19

able to produce crops to sell and sustain themselves. Unfortunately, the North Poudre Irrigation Company was not able to provide an irrigation system to the Soapstone Prairie area. Lack of water was one of the reasons several Soapstone Prairie homesteaders were forced to leave their land. However, it is that lack of water that helped preserve some of Soapstone Prairie's historic artifacts. If Soapstone Prairie homesteaders had been given access to irrigation, the croplands would have destroyed evidence of the historic Colorado and Central railroad line, the Wells Fargo stage line and the Cavalry's road to Laramie. Evidence of these exist today and can still be seen with a keen eye. These vestiges of historic travel and innovation would have been lost to time.

By the time most of the homesteaders were filing claims at Soapstone Prairie, a majority of the land along significant water resources, such as Rawhide Creek, Sand Creek and Soapstone Springs, had been previously settled by corporate ranching operations who owned the water rights. Homesteaders were forced to settle primarily in a valley that skirted the southern end of two of those operations, the Lindenmeier and Warren ranches, and north of the Buckeye Land and Cattle Company.

### **Help from the Federal Government**

The town of Wellington was a community deeply embedded in agricultural. Farmers' hands were stained pink from beet tops and their faces were weathered by the sun. They realized that to succeed they needed to work cooperatively. Farmers met monthly to support each other and discuss farm-related issues. In December 1910, the first Wellington branch of the Farmers Educational and Co-operative Union of America was organized by Mr. P. H. Boothroyd, a field agent of the union. This union cooperatively helped the farmers by arranging for supplies to be sent. Carloads of potatoes, coal, and corn were often delivered and distributed to farming residents in northern Colorado. Soon after, the Farmers Land and Water Company was established in Wellington, which helped farmers with dry-land farming by seeding wheat and digging irrigation ditches.

Responding to the challenges farmers were experiencing in the dryland areas of the country, the federal government created the Farm Bureau in July 1918 under the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It was managed by county representatives. Membership cost \$1.00 and provided members with a monthly newsletter discussing local farming matters including rates on seeds, feeds, and livestock, and financial help in shipping their product to market. The Farm Bureau representative for Wellington was James Rodgers (Fort Collins Courier 1918).

### **Coal**

The Soapstone Prairie homesteader had other locally specific opportunities for making a living and supporting a family. The land around Bristol Miner provided prosperous coal fields and excellent grazing for sheep and cattle.

*Cause I make all the money, hauling coal by the ton. But when Saturday goes around I'm too tired for havin' fun. I'm just workin' in a coal mine, goin' down, down, down.*

—Lee Dorsey, *Working in a Coal Mine*



Early Wellington coal miners; courtesy of Arlene and Harry Ahlbrandt

One hundred million years ago, the collision of two massive tectonic plates created a depression that was 621 miles wide, stretching from the Rocky Mountains to the Appalachians. This subduction allowed Arctic waters from the north and water from

the Gulf of Mexico to the south to converge in the central lowlands creating a warm tropical watershed known as the Western Interior Seaway (Great Cretaceous Seaway). Until 69 million years ago, Soapstone Prairie lay 2600 feet under water. As the seaway receded, coal deposits formed in the coastal swamps above the olive- and gray-colored late Cretaceous Pierre shale.



Bulger sign post; courtesy the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery

These deposits contained some of the best coal mining in the state of Colorado. Miners dug many tons of coal from these mines. Residents depended on the bituminous coal around Soapstone Prairie for cooking and heating; railroads depended on the mined coal for fuel. Mines in the area included Bulger City, Heston, Barrett Indian Springs, Tenney, and the Fort Collins Coal Mining Company. Veins of first grade coal were found as deep as 350-450 feet to very near the surface. If the coal was found near the surface, the min-



er needed to bend over to gather the coal making it literally a back breaking job. Coal fields were usually located in outlying areas far from other communities, so traveling to and from work would have been challenging for a Soapstone Prairie homesteader (Old Earth n.d.; Morse n.d.; Harbert 2006, 81-82).

Early Soapstone homesteader, John Thompson, worked for Bulger City coal mine from 1912 to 1914. He then took employment with the R. Q. Tenney Mine. Before homesteading at Soapstone Prairie, Thompson was a coal miner in Louisville, Colorado. The work was physically challenging and sometimes fatal. In 1941, the Wellington Sun related that 21 year-old Andy Nix died while working in the Hackman mine "... when the soapstone roof formation slipped sending down a heavy fall of rock upon the young man."

The chart below, shows the weekly pay rate of bituminous coal miners compared to other industries between 1920 and 1930. At an average of \$11.51 per week, farm workers made far less than miners or those employed in the manufacturing industry. This was the last decade the majority of homesteaders would inhabit Soapstone Prairie.

<b>Table 1: Real Average Weekly or Daily Earnings for Selected Occupations, 1920 to 1930.</b> (1929=100)					
<b>Year</b>	<b>(1) Weekly: Skilled and Semi-Skilled Male Production Workers in 25 Manufacturing Industries</b>	<b>(2) Weekly: Unskilled Male Production Workers in 25 Manufacturing Industries</b>	<b>(3) Weekly: Female Production Workers in 25 Manufacturing Industries</b>	<b>(4) Weekly: Bituminous Coal- Lignite Mining</b>	<b>(5) Farmworkers Daily Wage Rate</b>
1920	29.16	22.28	15.14	--	2.82
1921	26.19	19.41	14.96	--	1.96
1922	28.73	20.74	16.19	--	2.04
1923	30.93	22.37	17.31	25.51	2.36
1924	30.61	22.45	16.78	23.47	2.40
1925	30.57	22.41	16.78	25.64	2.30
1926	30.60	22.47	16.72	27.51	2.32
1927	31.09	23.22	17.14	23.85	2.32
1928	31.94	23.89	17.15	24.46	2.30
1929	32.60	24.40	17.61	25.11	2.30
1930	29.93	22.47	16.40	22.61	2.21

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, DC: USGPO, 1976). Col. (1): Series D844. Col. (2): Series D841. Col. (3): Series D838. Col. (4): Series D811. Col. (5): Series K181. All dollar figures were deflated by the Consumer Price Index from series E135 set to 1929=100.

*Courtesy of Gene Smiley*

By the turn of the 20th century, coal had replaced wood as fuel for the railroads. In 1912, coal was worth \$2.00 a ton with a steady and increasing demand. By the 1920s, other fuel sources such as natural gas and crude oil became available and coal mining industries experienced steep declines and many homesteaders had trouble finding work (Harbert 2006, 89).



## Cattle Ranching

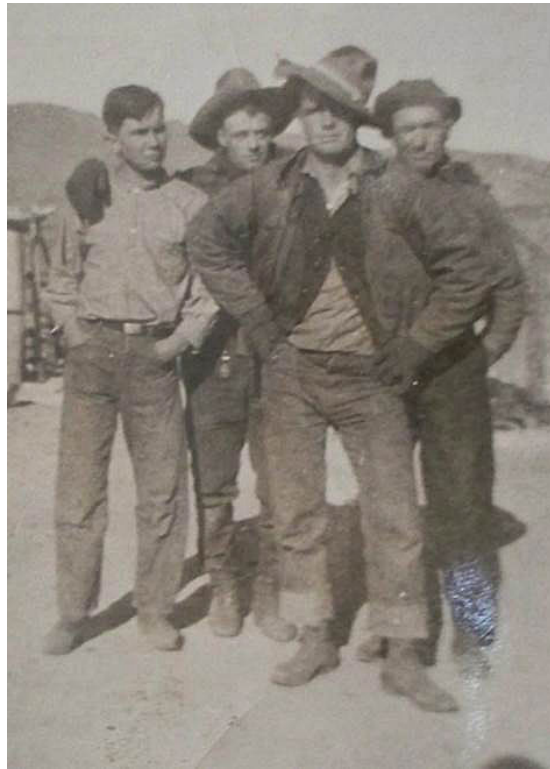
Soapstone Prairie was considered some of the best pasture land in Larimer County. Three corporate ranching operations were located in the Bristol Miner precinct (Soapstone Prairie): Warren Livestock Company, the Lindenmeier Ranch, and the Buckeye Land and Livestock Company.

The largest of the three was the Warren Livestock Company. It was located on approximately 48 sections of what we consider Soapstone Prairie today. This mega ranching outfit was created out of humble beginnings in 1870s Cheyenne, with a small starter herd of Mexican Merino sheep. It grew to mammoth proportions covering a quarter of a million acres, supporting tens of thousands of livestock and hundreds of employees for over 80 years. It was described by one of its foreman as “the vast empire.”

The Warrens employed upwards of 200 ranch hands each season. The company hired everyone from local experienced cowboys to Denver “down and outers” to help with the fencing, shearing and herding of the sheep and cattle. Early Soapstone Prairie homesteaders, John Grimm and siblings Paula and Warren Welch, were employed as Warren ranch hands.

The Lindenmeier Ranch was located in the heart of the Bristol Miner precinct and current Soapstone Prairie. It also originated in the 1870s in the ponderosa grove on the southwestern flank of Soapstone Prairie. By the early 1900s, it had grown to cover three additional sections in a valley below the ponderosa grove. The ranch was overseen by William Lindenmeier Jr., whom the Lindenmeier excavation site is named after. This successful operation kept sheep and cattle running on the pastureland below the Lindenmeier site until 1941 when it was sold. German immigrant and Cavalryman, Peter Welch provided for his family by working for the Lindenmeiers.

The Buckeye Land and Cattle Company, which had purchased its property from Noah Bristol in 1905, was located at the old Bristol Station at the junction of today’s Buckeye Road (Larimer County Road 82) and Rawhide Flats Road (Larimer County Road 15).



Ranch hands pause for a photo, circa 1925, at the Bear homestead located in the center of Soapstone Prairie. The Bears held their round up on May 31st of each year and employed local cowboys to help; *courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton*

This Ohio outfit (named for their state tree) raised cattle, sheep, wheat, and beets on the property. The Buckeye was in business for two decades before selling to the Denver Trust Company in 1927. The industrious homesteader, John Thompson ran cattle for the Buckeye Land and Cattle Company.

### **Immigration to Soapstone Prairie (Bristol Miner)**

Individuals from many different cultures and communities were drawn to the area of Soapstone Prairie by one common denominator: sustainable land. Whether it was the Folsom people following *Bison antiquus* in 10,000 B.C. or an entrepreneur such as homesteader Nelson Guy in the 20th century, Soapstone Prairie offered basic survival needs: the ability to harvest or hunt food, resources for building a shelter or home, and for the non-native American immigrants, the possibility of employment or income.

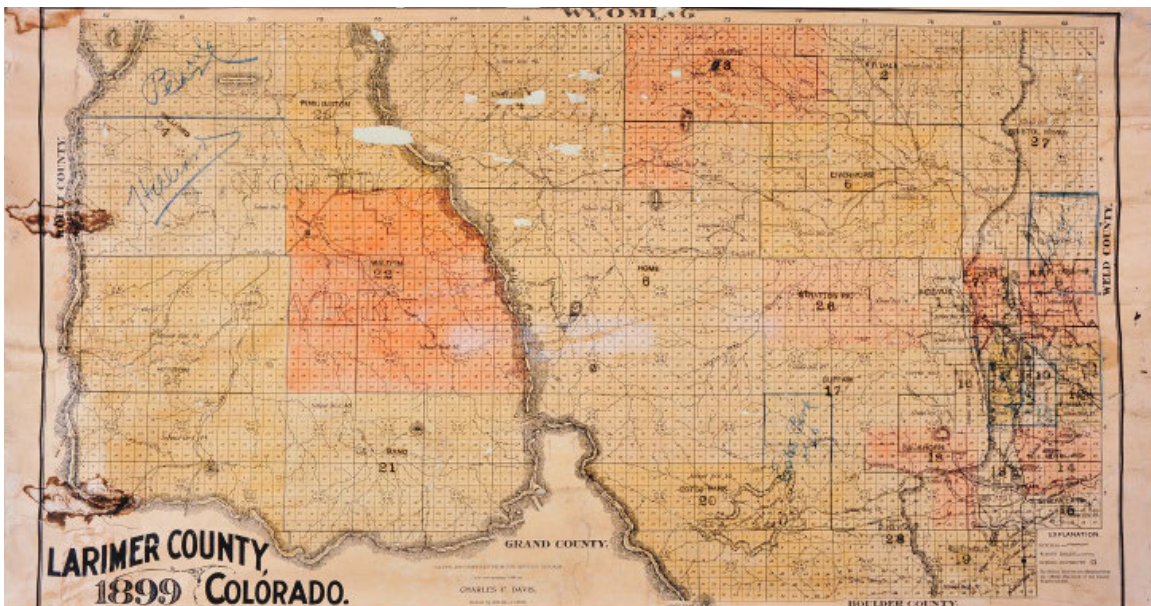
As the census records indicate, many hopeful homesteaders, farmers, coal miners, and others moved into the area north and west of Wellington at a swift rate from 1900 until approximately 1920. Those moving to this area were lured by promises of rich agriculture and an abundance of employment opportunities in the coal mines and ranching operations which were so copiously advertised. However, there were many unanticipated challenges.



View from upper Mahogany Trail; *courtesy Gary Raham*

## Scarce Land Opportunities

By the time the Soapstone Prairie homesteaders arrived, the land in and around Fort Collins had been proved up or purchased outright. There were limited lots left and they carried a large price tag. Additionally, due to the profitability of growing beets and wheat in Wellington in the early 1900s, the price of land had skyrocketed. Before the establishment of the sugar beet factories, land could be purchased for \$75 to \$125 an acre. By 1905, the price had increased to \$200-\$250 per acre. This was a high price for a weary settler who had used his or her life savings crossing the plains planning to settle in Fort Collins or Wellington. But north and west of Wellington and just south of the Wyoming border, was a wild terrain of shortgrass steppe. This landscape contained some of the last free land available for homesteading. In 1899, the area had been officially established as the Bristol Miner Precinct and today Soapstone Prairie is located in the heart of it. (Fort Collins Courier 1914).



Map of Larimer County dated 1899: Bristol Miner Precinct was located in the northeast corner of the County; *courtesy the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery*

## Origination of Bristol Miner Precinct

Bristol Miner Precinct was located in the northeast corner of Larimer County. Bristol Miner received its name from two early homesteaders and ranchers who settled in this area, Noah Bristol and William Miner.

Noah Bristol was a Vermont native who arrived in the Fort Collins and Wellington area in 1875. He purchased a ranch at the corner of today's CR 15 (Rawhide Flats Road) and CR 82 (Buckeye Road) from the previous settler, a colorful rancher named Elias "Pap" Whitcomb. Bristol continued growing sheep and cattle at this site and developed the location as an economic and communication hub for the surrounding community.





Noah Bristol; courtesy the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery.

Bristol Station included a post office, with Noah as postmaster, and a railroad depot for the Colorado and Central Railroad which whistled and roared through Soapstone Prairie from Cheyenne every late afternoon from 1877 to 1882. Upon becoming president of the First National Bank in Fort Collins, Noah sold his livestock and moved his family to town in 1880. However, he kept ownership of the property which also included a hotel and small mercantile. In 1907, he sold his land to the Buckeye Land and Development Company. Today, it is owned by local rancher Eldon Ackerman.

William Miner typified the standard livestock owner at the time. He was a native of the east coast, wealthy and influential, and connected to some of the most well-known names in northern Colorado and southern Wyoming such as land broker Abner Loomis, mill owner Benjamin Hottell, and politician-rancher Francis Warren. Miner is one of four men credited with bringing electric lighting to Fort Collins by incorporating the Fort Collins Light Heat and Power Company in the 1880s.

According to author Mary Dell Portner and Trulie Ackerman in their local history book, *I Am Buckeye*, “The first voting place was the bunk house which was located northeast of the ‘Ackerman’s shack.’ The voting area included all of his ranch—east to the County line, north to the Wyoming line, west to the foothills and south to Portner’s south line, thus including Miner’s ranch, which is how the name of Bristol Miner Precinct came into being...” (Portner 1976, 8).

## Census Records

Settlers were first attracted to the Bristol Miner area by the abundant ranch land. By the 1900s, farming and coal mining were added and many hopeful settlers moved in. However, in 1900, the U.S Census Bureau recorded only 31 households.

Their occupations:

- stockman
- laborer
- school teacher
- clerk
- servant

The native countries of these residents were United States, Ireland, Austria, and Canada.





Of Irish descent, the industrious and colorful Bear family occupied Soapstone Prairie until the 1970s; *courtesy of Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton*

Within the United States, the new settlers emigrated from California, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, Vermont, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

U.S. Census Bureau enumerator Maude Woods spent two weeks in the Bristol Miner Precinct in April, 1910, counting households, documenting occupations, and recording nativity (country of birth). Of the 71 dwellings in the precinct from Soapstone Prairie south, approximately 30 % (24 households) were occupied by immigrants. Nativity included England, Denmark, Germany, France, Italy, Austria and Sweden. Immigrants arrived to the Wellington and Bristol Miner area in search of employment with the coal mines, beet growers, or ranchers. With increased opportunities in farming, the development of the Colorado and Southern Railroad, and the emergence of the coal mining industry, the population in the Bristol Miner Precinct doubled from 1900-1910 with 71 dwellings and 12 occupations:

- farmer
- stockman
- laborer
- teamster
- civil engineer
- railroad section worker
- surveyor
- coal miner
- milliner
- blacksmith
- laundress
- minister

These residents came from:

- Scotland
- Germany
- England
- France
- Denmark
- Italy
- Bohemia
- Belgium
- Sweden
- United States

From 1910 to 1920, only 11 additional households were added. However, as indicated from the occupations listed, livestock and ranching industries skyrocketed during this time. This would fit the timeframe when the enormous Warren Livestock Company was in full swing. We also see that Bristol Miner was progressing in communication and had developed an electric grid.

- farmer
- sheep herder
- farm hand
- cattle ranch
- ranch manager
- ranch foreman
- cattle feeder
- railroad section foreman
- mechanic
- wheat farmer
- telegraph operator
- sheep tender
- horse breaker
- coal miner
- electrician
- school teacher

The native languages recorded for these residents also became increasingly diverse:

- French
- Swedish
- English
- German
- Welsh
- Swiss
- Scottish
- Polish
- Russian
- Austrian
- Irish
- Spanish
- Italian
- Belgian
- United States

Within the United States, these newer settlers emigrated from Nebraska, Ohio, Missouri, Pennsylvania, Canada, Illinois, Idaho, Minnesota, Maryland, Kentucky, Wyoming, Utah, Iowa, New York, Michigan, Rhode Island, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Kansas, South Dakota and Louisiana.

By 1930, during the Depression era, only one new dwelling was recorded in the Bristol Miner area, bringing the population to 83 households. The coal miner had been replaced with the oil worker. School teachers are not recorded. The occupation of bus driver indicates the end of the rural school era and the emergence of transporting students to larger schools.

- ranch hand
- farm laborer
- herder
- bus driver
- professor
- railroad section hand
- oil field worker
- flagman
- telegraph operator
- engineer
- mechanic
- gas injector

### **The Industrial Age of the Roaring 20s and Economics of Homesteaders**

The intense immigration to the Bristol Miner Precinct created an incredibly culturally diverse but tightknit melting pot of people. However, by 1928 Bristol Miner witnessed an exodus of the majority of the homesteaders due to several factors. During the “roaring 20s,” industries that had previously employed homesteaders, such as agriculture and mining, were now mechanized. Technological advances such as the Farmall general purpose tractor which could pull heavy harvesting machines as well as plant and cultivate row crops were displacing the workforce. The increase in mechanization of agricultural production reduced required manual labor by as much as 50%, by 1930. Mechanical loading devices in the bituminous coal mining industry reduced the labor required by 24 to 50 percent by the mid-1920s. By 1925, bituminous coal prices fell sharply and many mines ceased operation. The shift to electricity brought about changes and coal mining became a declining industry.

Immigration to the U.S. also fell sharply during the interwar period. In response to post World War I demobilization which caused an increase in unemployment, the 1921 Emergency Quota Law (Emergency Immigration Act) was enacted which temporarily limited the number of immigrants to the U.S. This restricted the number of immigrants to 357,000 per year. The Immigration Act of 1924 (Johnson-Reed Act) further decreased the quota to 2% of the foreign-born population, and set the year on which the calculations were based to 1890. Soapstone Prairie would never see another influx of foreign-born immigrants with the magnitude of its early years again. By the early 1930s Soapstone Prairie homesteaders such as John Grimm and Peter Welch found employment through President Franklin Roosevelt’s work relief programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration while living in Laporte and Fort Collins (Moore 2008) (Cooley 2009) (Smiley n.d.) (1921 Emergency Quota Law n.d.) (Office of the Historian n.d.).

## Limited Land and Scarce Water

The migration to Soapstone Prairie after the turn of the 20th century was triggered by increased governmental assistance, opportunity, and limited homesteading land available in neighboring communities. With the picturesque Rocky Mountains to the west and the serene ocean of prairie to the east, the settlers may have been attracted to the location because of its beauty as well, and found hope in its aesthetics. The measureless terrain flowed contiguously for miles, interrupted only by an occasional earthen dome, provided a vast environment for an independent homesteader's biggest goals and dreams. However, once moving to the area, the Soapstone Prairie homesteader soon learned that paradise came with a price.

Large ranching operations such as the mammoth Warren Livestock Company had been running sheep and cattle in the area of northern Colorado and southern Wyoming since the 1870s. Their fence lines occupied approximately three quarters of the land through Soapstone Prairie that homesteaders wanted to claim. The Lindenmeier family had arrived at Soapstone Prairie in 1884. By 1911, beginning with the purchase of a quarter section of land near the ponderosa pine grove, the Lindenmeiers had acquired three additional sections and established grazing land along a lush, spring-producing valley on the southwest rim of Soapstone Prairie where they ran upwards of 3,000 head of cattle. Therefore, the availability of homesteading land near a running water source was scarce. Many homesteaders had to file a claim close to water resources such as Wire Draw or Sand Wash or build a well by hand. The homesteaders were forced into a small section between the wealthy ranchers to the north and the enviable verdant agricultural land to the south.

## Severe Weather Challenges

The wind, the wind, never ceasing  
Now a whisper, now increasing  
To toss the fields into the air  
To dust my sills and leave it there  
Then to run and play, only to return again  
The wind, the wind...

—local homesteader Charles Phillips

Recreationists today may experience an unexpected summer squall drenching the Cheyenne Rim Trail or a sudden lightning storm that sends them for cover at the North Lot. With the absence of large geological formations and vegetation to buffer the northwesterly winds, Soapstone Prairie can experience high winds. Fifty plus mile an hour gusts are not uncommon and have become synonymous with Soapstone. The homesteaders also had to deal with extreme weather conditions (D. Morse 2017).



From 1997-2000, Amado (Junior) Gonzalez generously reprinted records of the *Wellington Sun* newspaper reports dating from 1905 to 1950. Below are excerpts from those local reports regarding the adverse conditions that challenged settlers, farmers and ranchers. Also included are excerpts from a book titled, *The Way it Was*, written by Warren Livestock Company ranch foreman Dave Cook, who spent 40 years on this prairie and would have been well acquainted with these same challenges. A contemporary of Cook, Charles Phillips was a ranch hand of the Warren Livestock Company. Phillips' unpublished manuscript, *The Dryland Diary* provides further descriptions of challenges inhabitants faced.



Soapstone Prairie; courtesy of Sue Kenney

Sixty-mile-an-hour wind gusts, were not uncommon. These removed roofs from homesteads and demolished outbuildings and destroyed livestock fencing. On Saturday, April 13, 1912, Soapstone Prairie and Wellington residents experienced one of the most destructive wind storms in their history when gusts kicked up in the morning. By the afternoon, the path of the storm had caused considerable property damage in its wake. In May 1927, the winds were so severe that hundreds of drivers between Wellington and Cheyenne were forced to abandon their cars and seek shelter in nearby homes as the wind blew drifts from a late spring snow onto the highways. It was reported that all the homes in the 35-mile stretch were filled with marooned travelers.

Spring and early summer electrical storms also created deadly conditions. Lightning killed farmers and livestock. As Cook recalls, "With many herds of sheep being pastured over a vast area of range, it was quite a common occurrence for lightning to strike a band often killing many." Cook recounts an experience with lightning: "The sky was clear, there was no thunder and just one bright flash, but it hit the mark...we counted quite a number of dead sheep." (Cook 1980, 133).

Charles Phillips recalls a particularly stormy morning around 1918 when his mother was hit by lightning in their sod home. The bolt traveled through an exposed stove-pipe to the stove where she was cooking the afternoon meal. The surge of electricity knocked her to the ground along with tubs of water contained near the stove. After being revived she told her husband that he could "...get his own damn dinner!" (Phillips n.d., 11).

In May 1911, lightning from a late spring thunderstorm struck a camp just south of Soapstone Prairie, injuring one man and killing two mules. The following year a large work horse belonging to a farmer in the area was killed by lightning during one of the season's many electrical storms. One of Soapstone Prairie's earliest homesteaders, Ben Roman, was killed by lightning on April 12th, 1945, while working the range. Ben's father-in-law, Peter Welch died four days later from injuries sustained from that same lightning strike.

Punishing hail storms often moved through the area, ravaging crops and leaving hundreds of lifeless rabbits in its wake. In June 1926, a huge hailstorm traveled through Soapstone Prairie and south through Wellington causing tremendous damage to the settlers' homes. Many orchards and crops were decimated and glass windows of the homesteads broken. In July 1942, a late afternoon storm struck the area from the northwest. As it moved through the valley its path was three-four miles wide, and dropped marble-sized hail which demolished crops and killed hundreds of domestic chickens and turkeys.

Summer droughts were often followed by paralyzing winter blizzards, causing heavy livestock losses. 1911 was a particularly dry year with at least seven weeks in June and July with little or no rain. During drought, the soil would get so hard that homesteaders had tremendous difficulty plowing up the beets and potatoes without breaking them into pieces. The severe droughts in 1890 and the early 1900s, coupled with the financial panics of 1893 and 1907, caused enormous stress on the land and its inhabitants in northern Colorado. Those who relied on rainfall to water their crops did not survive in the arid climate.

Harry and Arlene Ahlbrandt recount several stories of Wellington area blizzards in their book *Wellington's First 100 Years 1905-2005: A Pictorial History Book*, which is primarily based on the couple's personal experiences, oral history records, and the Wellington Sun newspaper reports. Below are three excerpts:

During the "Big Snow" of December 5, 1913, a howling storm from out of the north dumped three feet of snow in three days.

In March 1922, a storm which lasted several days left 3.58 inches of moisture and three feet of snow.

Many flat roof tops were damaged, windows destroyed and chickens frozen to death when a June 1922 storm, which lasted only thirty minutes covered a two-mile-wide area (Ahlbrandt 2005, 27).

In the semi-arid climate of northern Colorado, homesteaders learned quickly that rain does not always follow the plow, but occasionally, a storm of grasshoppers will. Fall plowing buried grasshopper eggs in the soil. The following spring thunderstorms and balmy summer heat could unleash a plague of grasshoppers. According to newspaper reports, outbreaks of grasshoppers could occur almost immediately on a plowed field after a heavy rain in northern Colorado. The years 1908 and 1909 were particularly severe. Reports of these pests taking out hundreds of acres of wheat would send fear into the hearts of dryland farmers (Gillette 1910).

Author and newspaper editor, Ansel Watrous, recorded grasshopper plagues as early as 1864 on the settlement of Fort Collins in his epic local history, *History of Larimer County*. Another infestation, in 1873, hit the county and many residents left (Watrous, *History of Larimer County* 1911, 20, 52).

On Soapstone Prairie, the earliest record for grasshopper plagues also dates to 1864 when Lieutenant Colonel William Oliver Collins and a company of the 11th Ohio Volunteer Cavalry camped at Jack Springs, which today is located on the southern section of the Plover Trail on Soapstone Prairie Natural Area. Collins' report from the trip:

Friday, August 12th. Left camp about 6 a. m. Road hilly and circuitous, water in one or two small branches, especially on Little Crow creek. A few miles from camp where party with prisoners from Camp Collins had camped last night, met them two or three miles from our camp. Road thence broken, circuitous and latter part muddy to Jack Springs, when stopped for noon; distance about twenty-two miles. Road generally good; no wood or water. Grasshoppers appeared in swarms as we left camp." (Watrous, *History of Larimer County* 1911, 214).

By 1909, climatic conditions, in conjunction with increased homesteading and plowing, produced the perfect storm for infestations. Grasshoppers in the area started consuming garden vegetables and sweet peas. However, once they had devoured those, they moved on to alfalfa, grain, and beet leaves. Farmers could lose 10 to 15 bushels an acre of oats due to grasshoppers. (Fort Collins Courier 1909)

Two residents described the plagues on their farms in the Waverly and Wellington area. A farmer who signed his name simply "Charlie" wrote, "...the grasshoppers got so thick around Waverly this year that they milked the cows when [we] weren't looking and just about ruined the butter business." (Fort Collins Courier 1910). Another contributor wrote "Our crop of grasshoppers is growing and developing nicely and

with a continuance of the present fine weather will be ready for harvesting in two weeks at the latest.” (Fort Collins Courier 1910).

Homesteaders utilized three methods to dispose of the pests:

- In despair, town officials in Wellington decided to allow chickens to run loose since the insects made good meals for the poultry. Some farmers often used portable chicken coops to transport their hens to other infested areas.
- Farmers were also directed to remove the grasshopper eggs from the surfaces of ditch beds by digging and plowing them up in the winter months.
- In more serious cases, a homesteader could use a “hopper dozer” which was a net that could attach behind a team of horses and be dragged along back and forth over the field while the grain was still young.

(Washburn 1912; Fort Collins Courier 1910).

However, almost as quickly as they appeared, the grasshoppers were gone. In 1910, an employee of the Agricultural College who had been studying the pests wrote that “...grasshoppers have been dying in considerable numbers recently upon some of the ranches in the northern part of Colorado. The cause of death is a parasitic fungus, *Empusa grylli* by name.” (Gillette 1910). Three Soapstone Prairie homesteader families affected by the grasshopper infestations were the Romans (1906-2002), the Guys (1908-1917), and the Grimms (1910-1930).

Soapstone Prairie is home to the western prairie rattlesnake (*Crotalus viridis*). They are still present but sightings are rare and interactions with the venomous pit viper are even less common. However, they could be a source of contention for a homesteader, threatening livestock or chicken eggs. For farmers, the first eighty acres plowed on the homestead could produce a rattlesnake per acre. Homesteader Martha Thompson was known for having a cellar full of canned rattles taken from the many rattlesnakes she killed on her property.

Dave Cook recalls encountering dens of rattlers that contained several dozen snakes and he often travelled with a shotgun to kill them. Ranchers occasionally used dynamite to get rid of large dens. Cook often cautioned truckers hauling hay to watch for rattlers that would seek shade under the hay sheds (Phillips n.d., 5) (Sandmann 2012) (Cook 1980, 137, 146,152).

## **Life of a Homesteader**

Homesteaders often used their wagons and trucks as temporary homes while building their prairie homesteads. Several families had residences in Fort Collins in addition to their claim site, but many used Soapstone Prairie as their primary home. The homesteads were made of available natural materials such as river rock, sandstone, and sod. They constructed dugouts with timber roofs. Other structures were built of milled



timber from Wellington or adobe (a limestone-grout mixture). A root cellar and latrine were also necessary. Root cellars were built underground; the dimensions normally were 8 feet wide and 14 feet long with a slanting stairway going down to a cellar door entrance. Cellars were often constructed by standing railroad ties on end to form the walls and the roof was covered in three feet of soil. All canned goods, vegetables, fruit and anything edible that was subject to freezing was stored in the cellar. (Phillips n.d., 15)

As a requirement of the Homestead Act of 1862, the homesteaders needed to get an income from the land. Therefore, chicken houses and corrals for livestock were the next structures built. Selling chicken eggs or cream in Wellington, Cheyenne or Denver was an easy way to meet the income requirement and kept the “wolf away.”

If a homesteader wasn’t lucky enough to file a claim near a spring, they had to dig a well by hand. Depending on the water source, the well might be 25 feet deep. The homesteader used river rock, granite stones or other natural resources found in the area for the walls. Local oral history recounts tales of homesteading children being lowered by a rope secured around their waist to the depths of the well. The brave child would then repeatedly scoop the soil into a bucket and send it back up until the well was dug.



Aeromotor wind pump at Soapstone Prairie; courtesy Gary Raham

The people of Soapstone Prairie never had the luxury of electric lighting. Homesteaders used several different methods to light or provide running water to their homestead. With the constant wind, most homesteaders used windmills or wind pumps to provide energy to their home.

Often windmills were purchased from a catalog, complete with instructions for assembly. The most popular companies were the Dempster Company of Beatrice, Nebraska, Aeromotor Windmills in Broken Bow, Oklahoma, and Sears and Roebuck Company. When constructing the windmill, a homesteader could risk injury from climbing the 30-40-foot tower or when mounting the sharp blades. According to the Ahlbrandt family in *Wellington’s First 100 Years*, “Windmills used the power of the wind to pump water into storage tanks fed by gravity for indoor plumbing.” (Ahlbrandt 2005, 37).

Keith Roman, a grandson of early homesteader, Ben Roman, remembers his mother being able to watch soap operas at the homestead in the 1970s with the use of a wind pump-fueled generator. The generator provided energy to a 6-volt battery that powered her small television set. Roman relates that most all of the homesteaders used a wind pump to provide energy to their homes.

By 1900, the application of electricity in the home was big business and brought in 97 million dollars from various products. Carbide lighting was becoming increasingly popular especially in rural areas. A calcium carbide lamp cost \$3.50 in Wellington, available from a salesman named W. A. Hawthorne (Fort Collins Courier, 1900, 1902).

Carbide lighting used a water drip mechanism in which there was an upper and lower chamber. The upper chamber contained water which would drip onto the calcium carbide in the lower chamber and produce a white flame. The water could be adjusted and the more water that was allowed to drip on the carbide, the larger the flame (History n.d.).

Nelson Guy began homesteading at Soapstone Prairie in 1908 and used carbide lighting for his two-story clapboard home. He is the only homesteader at Soapstone Prairie known to have used carbide. Guy mortgaged a quarter section of his property to pay for the lighting. However, carbide lighting was expensive and dangerous.

Consumers soon learned that the burner tips inside the lamps easily became clogged resulting in explosions. The Fort Collins Courier published a report of a young man being injured from an explosion while filling a carbide tank at a skating rink in Fort Collins. The Mosman Hotel in Walden, Colorado also experienced an explosion from their carbide lamps, which hurled a man 30 feet into the air (History n.d.) (Fort Collins Courier, 1904, 1908).

Keith and Myrna Roman, who purchased the Guy property in the 1970s (from William "Ed" Guy, who lived at the location and was the son of Nelson Guy), recall a conversation they had with Ed regarding the carbide lamps. Guy told the Romans that his father was preyed upon by a carbide salesman and finally relented to purchasing the expensive equipment by mortgaging his property. Nelson Guy left the property almost penniless in 1917. It is thought that the cost of the carbide may have been what broke him and forced him to leave to find work elsewhere. By 1918, carbide lamps were being replaced by battery-powered lamps and were no longer in use by the 1930s (History n.d.).

The women and children were responsible for milking the cows twice a day, at 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. If the family had not put up fencing the cows had to be found and rounded up first. This meant a horse had to be caught and saddled. Often, it was the children who were responsible for milking the cows before and after school. Some

homesteading families in this area made a percentage of their living from selling cream to a creamery in Denver. According Phillips, “Besides helping with the milking, we all helped with the feeding of the livestock, cleaning the barns, harnessing and caring for the horses, or anything else dad could think for us to do before breakfast.”

Chicken eggs were gathered in the afternoon. Occasionally, a protective “setting hen” or “cluck” would peck the hand of the unfortunate person who was attempting to gather the eggs. Children carried heavy buckets of milo, oats, and ground corn for the hens and roosters.



Kitchen with stove, Great Western Sugar Company's beet sugar workers colony at Hudson, Colorado; *courtesy Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.*

The pride and joy of the mother of the home was always the cook stove. Soapstone Prairie homesteaders were fortunate to live near coal mines and this was most often used for fuel. Otherwise, in this land of limited wood, cow manure chips were used. If those ran out, homesteader families often used abandoned railroad ties for fuel.

Gardens grew potatoes, cabbage, onions, carrots, and beets were most often planted. Homesteading families did a lot of canning. Cherries, tomatoes, green beans, rhubarb, peaches, and chokecherries were canned. Soapstone Prairie homesteader, Martha Thompson was known to can rattlesnake rattles.

Children attended school during the day and needed to get most of their chores done before class. Children either got to school by wagon, horseback, or car. Soapstone Prairie children attended school until the 5th grade and then continued their education in Waverly. Most children did not go beyond the 8th grade.

Homesteader families were usually in good communication with each other and would have get-togethers at least twice a week, either at a homestead or the school. The children played games such as “hide and go seek,” “beckon beckon,” or “shinny on your own side.” The teen boys hunted jackrabbits, while the adults would share a meal.

Phillips writes, “Hunting on the dry-land was the way of life, especially in the Depression era of the late twenties and early thirties. In the winter months, after the morning chores were done, we would start hunting. One winter, we sold over a hundred dollars worth of jackrabbit skins. It seems that the twenty-two rifle was as much a part of the homesteader's life as the milk pail; we were never far from either.”

Evenings were the most enjoyable time of the day for the homesteading family. Once the dinner was finished and the dishes cleaned, the family retired to the living area. They might reflect on their day and then one of the adult might read aloud to the children before putting them to bed. Below, Charles Phillips wrote a poem of his memories of growing up on a homestead:

As we travel back memory  
O'er things from out of the past  
The hardships are most forgotten  
It's the pleasant things that last.

One such thing that I recall  
When all the chores were done  
With all the coal and kindling in  
We'd gather one by one.

Each seemed to have a favorite spot  
And we would guard it rather proud;  
Then Dad would tend the heater  
And Mom would read out loud

Oh! The places we went, the things we did!  
All the heroes we saw and heard.  
Ah! The chills of joy that ran our spines  
As we would cling to every word.

Now things have changed and time has spent;  
But with this memory are we endowed:  
When Dad would tend the heater  
And Mom would read out loud.  
—Charles Phillips



# *Families of Soapstone*

Opportunity brought them here. Courage kept them here. Ingenuity helped them survive. Over 100 years ago, the solitude of northern Colorado and the opportunity to own land attracted more than two dozen homesteading families to the area that is now Soapstone Prairie Natural Area. They were challenged by paralyzing blizzards, devastating drought and the ever-present threat of economic hardship.

## **Roman Family 1906-2002**

160 Acres Issue Date: December 14, Original Homestead Act of 1862

The youngest of seven children, Antonio Romano was born in Italy on January 5, 1877. At the age of 10, Antonio immigrated to Boulder, Colorado with his widowed father, Dominico. By early 1900, his name was changed to Tony Roman and he was working in a brick mill and as a coal miner. During the first decade of the twentieth century immigrants from Italy, Germany, and Russia were hired to replace striking coal miners.



Mary, Antonio, and baby Benjamino Romano, in Boulder, Colorado circa 1900; courtesy Keith and Myrna Roman

The tiresome and treacherous occupation of an open-pit coal miner was oftentimes the only work an immigrant could find. On July 3, 1900, Tony wed another Italian immigrant, 17-year-old Mary (maiden name unknown) in Boulder, Colorado.

Seeking the opportunity to own land, in 1906, Tony filed a Homestead Act of 1862 claim on 160 acres in the Bristol Miner Precinct. Leaving his father in Boulder, Tony moved Mary and the first three of seven children to the homestead located at the base of Round Butte. The three children were Benjamino (Ben) Romano (b. 1901), Francesco (Frank) Carmine (b. 1902), and Marguerite (Margaret) Saba (b. 1904). The Roman family was Soapstone Prairie's earliest homesteaders.



Left to right: Antonio, Benjamino, Francesco, Marguerite, and mother Mary Romano circa 1906;  
courtesy Keith and Myrna Roman

Tony continued to work in Boulder County as a coal miner while proving up on the homestead. Although there is no record that Tony worked at the coal mines near Soapstone Prairie, the development of the mines may have attracted him to the area.

Tony's grandson, Keith, and his wife Myna, related Tony's experience as a new homesteader:

*The Italians were the ones that immigrated into here during the Homestead Act, because if you could improve up on what was on a 160 (acre), plant a tree, then it belonged to you. And when they came here, it was really tough. I mean it was really tough. Grandpa Roman, he would come on the train to Carr and then would have to get from there to the ranch site, and they proved up on it. Then he lucked out hitting water, real shallow. And some of the other ones didn't survive because of the lack of water. The abundant water allowed Tony and his wife Mary to run sheep on the land and raise a family (Martin 2009, 24).*

With a growing family on his hands, Tony ended the commute to the Boulder coal mines in 1910. Along with Mary, they farmed their land as the five-year deadline for proving up approached. The abundant water near Round Butte allowed Tony and Mary to run sheep on the land and raise a family. Two more children were born to the couple at the homestead: Domenic (Dom) was born October 20, 1908 and Angelo (Joe) was born in January 1910. Tony and Mary successfully proved up on December 14, 1911, and gained legal ownership of the homestead. Six months after proving up torrential rains drenched Bristol Miner and flooded the Roman's property. The flood washed out a hand-dug well. Tony painstakingly removed the sand and dirt and reconstructed it.

Tony not only homesteaded, he was also very active in the community of Bristol Miner and Wellington. In 1910, Tony was appointed to the Exhibit Committee for the annual Wellington Harvest Jubilee.



Round Butte with Colorado and Central rail bed in foreground; *photo courtesy Kenneth Jessen*

In 1914, the Wellington Sun newspaper reported on a “kitchen sweat”<sup>1</sup> that the Roman’s held at their homestead. “Tony Roman, prosperous rancher and dairy man about 15 miles north of Wellington holds a party and dance for about 75 friends and neighbors at his home last Saturday night. All danced until almost morning.”

In 1920, he was elected secretary of Rural School District 55, for which he was required to travel to Fort Collins to assist with teacher meetings. Tony also supplied coal to the area. Three years later, he was elected director of the North Larimer County Federal Farm Loan Association. The organization provided loans up to \$25,000 to aid local farmers. In 1923, the association had loaned \$256,000 to homesteaders and farmers (*Fort Collins Courier* 1913) (*Fort Collins Courier* 1910, 1923) (*Sun* 1914).

Between 1912 and 1914, Tony and Mary had two more children born at the homestead. Eugenio (Gene) was born December 26, 1912 and Phillip (Phil) Gioverdi was born February 5, 1914.

Several years after Phil’s birth, tragedy struck the family. Mary died unexpectedly, leaving 15-year-old daughter Margaret to care for her father and six siblings.

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<sup>1</sup> A “kitchen sweat” was a social event commonly held in a home, which included music such as a fiddle and banjo. The party goer usually ended up in the kitchen where they would dance and get sweaty, therefore the term “kitchen sweat”.

Keith and Myrna Roman tell of a gentleman of Greek descent named George Annapolis who got off the train at the Norfolk depot<sup>2</sup> and walked to the Roman house to visit Margaret. Eventually they were married. George later owned a hat shop in Greeley, Colorado.

Tony continued growing wheat crops on his land and taught his sons the skill of sheep farming which would help them later in life.

In June of 1896, the residents of Fort Collins unanimously passed Ordinance #14 which made the manufacturing and distributing of alcohol illegal, punishable with a \$200.00 fine for each offense. Nearly overnight saloon owners went from well-respected businessmen to shady bootleggers. However, the illegalization of alcohol also opened an enormous enterprise for others. Distilling provided another income source for several Soapstone Prairie homesteaders. Tony Romano was one of those who took the opportunity.

The hills of Soapstone Prairie became a sanctuary for rum runners for several reasons: the elevation allowed moonshiners to see incoming traffic from as far as ten miles away. This gave them time to determine whether the dust coming up the trail was law enforcement or a paying customer. The isolation of the prairie acted as a natural buffer from the public eye. The vast amount of land provided plenty of room to hide a still and supplies. In addition, the still “wet” state of Wyoming, where alcohol was allowed, was over the hills to the north, just five miles away. This was useful in case a hurried escape was needed. Moonshiners made bootleg out of anything that would ferment including chokecherries, plums, wheat, barley, and corn. If these were scarce they would use sugar and raisins for flavor (David 2014).

According to Keith Roman, his grandfather Tony was notorious for distilling moonshine. Tony and his son Gene sold it to the men at the military base in Cheyenne. They smuggled the moonshine in milk bottles that had been painted white. The scheme backfired when Tony got the bottles mixed up. Once it was learned that there was moonshine in the bottles, Gene was arrested and served jail time. Upon getting caught a second time, Tony gave up on the “milk bottle” venture but not on moonshining.

In April 1924, the cellar and barn of the Roman homestead was raided by prohibition officers. The agents found evidence that a distillery had been removed along with empty barrels and vats with mash. But no liquor was discovered. Neighbors believed that Tony may have been tipped off and removed the evidence. But two years later Tony wasn't so fortunate. On September 16, 1926, agents found a hundred-gallon still in an elaborate dugout in his wheat field. Tony was arrested and put in the County jail in Fort Collins. One week later, he was released on a \$2,500 bond to await his trial.

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<sup>2</sup> Norfolk depot was a Union Pacific Railroad depot located west of current Interstate 25 near Carr, Colorado. It is no longer in use.

On December 2, 1926, he was acquitted of county charges, but his celebration would last only moments. As he was exiting the court room, he was immediately arrested by agents to answer to federal charges of bootlegging (Gonzalez 1997, 38, 75, 76).

Step granddaughter, Anna Loader, recalled:

There was a lot of bootlegging ... my grandmother's second marriage, she married Tony Roman, and he designed the still and he buried it under the pigpen and so he got along just fine. Doing great – and I don't know who turned him in. But anyway, the revenueurs came and my uncle was about 18 at that time ... and so they arrested him too. Well, of course he was a child, but they fined him \$300 and then Tony had to go to jail. But they had a lot of bootlegging. That was a business all its own" (Martin 2009, 48).

Three months before the raid, on June 14, 1926. Tony married a 45-year-old English immigrant named Margaret Ashburn in Boulder, Colorado. Before the marriage, Margaret lived on one section removed from Tony to the southwest, with three of her five children. Upon her marriage, her oldest son, Robert and little brother Leonard moved out to live on their own. Robert worked as a school bus driver to support them. Margaret moved into the Roman house with her youngest daughter Margaret who was seven years old.<sup>3</sup>

However, by 1940 Tony and Margaret were divorced. Six years after the divorce Margaret died and was buried in Grandview Cemetery with daughter Hilda, first husband Robert, and son Leonard. Tony passed away on December 11, 1957 and was buried on the 14th of December, at Grandview Cemetery in Fort Collins, the exact same date that he proved up on his homestead 46 years earlier.

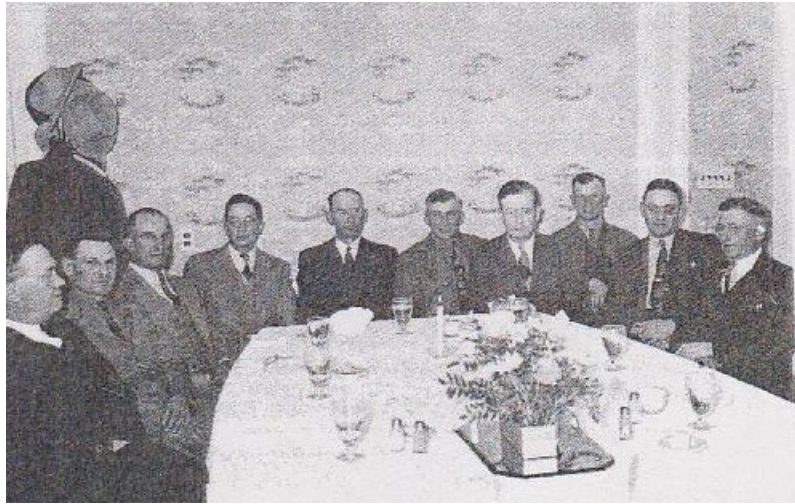
In 1929, the oldest son, Ben Roman married another Soapstone Prairie homesteader, Paula Welch. Two years later when their only child, Benjamin was born, the couple moved to Carr, Colorado. Both worked for the Warren Livestock Company as ranch hands. During WWII Ben registered for the draft while he and Paula were living in Nunn, Colorado and working for Tony. Unfortunately, Ben was struck and killed by lightning on April 12, 1945 while working the range near Carr.. He is buried in Linn Grove Cemetery in Greeley, Colorado. Paula never remarried and by the 1950s had moved to Cheyenne, Wyoming where she retired. Son Benjamin Roman moved to Laramie, Wyoming as an adult where he married Betty (maiden name unknown) and worked for a fish hatchery (Linn Grove Cemetery Greeley, Colorado n.d.).

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<sup>3</sup> Additional information regarding the Ashburn family is located in this chapter



Both Dom and Joe began working in their teens for the Warren Livestock Company (WLSC). Dom Roman was hired as the equipment superintendent and worked with Fred and Francis Warren, Jr. By 1940, he had married Wanetta Fay David and moved to Cheyenne, to be closer to the WLSC headquarters. Between 1940 and 1960, Dom was employed as the garage foreman for the WLSC.



Domenic Roman, seated second from left next to Warren Livestock Company president and owner Fred Warren; *courtesy Dave Cook, The Way It Was.*

Around 1930, Joe Roman married another Bristol Miner resident, Dorothy Rodarmel. Keith was born in 1933, the only child of the couple. Keith Roman attended East School, which today is located south of the Rawhide Power Plant on County Road 82. Dorothy drove the “school bus,” which Keith says was actually a “big old Studebaker.”

Four years after Tony’s death, Joe and Dorothy Roman purchased the Bear homestead from Ward Berten (Bert) and Guy Raymond (Ray) Bear. Keith and his wife, Myrna, ran cattle on the land until 2002 when they sold the property to the City of Fort Collins in 2004. Myrna shared how she and Keith got into the cattle business over 40 years ago:

Well, basically why we got started up here was, like I said, his folks bought the Bear brothers out in 1961 because that was the same year we also bought the land where the wind farm is, south of where we live [in Cheyenne]. So we had bought that piece and his folks had bought this piece, and that’s when we got into the livestock business, basically. And then in, what was it, early seventies, we bought the land south of here, the Guy place and part of the Monroe place, and expanded that way. (Roman, 2012).

On New Year’s Eve, 1949, the Roman family lost four members, when Phil and his wife Ione, and their two children Peggy and Tony died in a blizzard several yards from their home near Rockport, Colorado, while returning from a party given by a neighbor.



Left to right: Bert Bear, Joe Roman and Ray Bear; *courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton*

Leo Fenton, a descendent of another local homesteading family, the Bears, provides this account of the events:

There was a very bad blizzard and Phil (Tony's son) and Ione, and (their) two children had come down and Phil and Ione and Mary Ellen's [Leo Fenton's wife] folks had went to a dance—a New Year's Eve dance—and when they got back to Mary Ellen's folks' place, why they begged them to stay there with them and they said no, we have chores tomorrow. So they went on up on the prairie. And now they found Phil with one child in his arms about 100 yards and his wife, Ione was behind him, maybe another 10 yards and all four had frozen to death and they were just very close to their home. Lost them in that blizzard." (Martin 2009, 75).

Frank Roman moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin where he started an auto body business. He passed away on February 27, 1990 and is buried in the Wisconsin Memorial Cemetery in Brookfield, Wisconsin (TLZ 2009).

Eugene Roman died November 14, 1991, and is buried in Linn Grove Cemetery in Greeley, Colorado (Linn Grove Cemetery Greeley, Colorado n.d.).

As an adult, young Margaret Ashburn married, Joseph Armstrong, a construction supervisor from Waverly, Colorado and the couple resided in Fort Collins for most of their lives. Margaret died January 1, 1987 and is buried in Riverton, Wyoming. Joseph Armstrong passed away in 2012 (Stewart 2008).

## Guy Family 1908-1913

160 Acres, Original Homestead Act of 1862

Nelson Adell Guy was born in November 1865, in Longs Creek, Iowa, to Adam and Lydia Guy. When Nelson was fifteen years old, the family moved to Terre Haute, Indiana, to live with his older sister, Elizabeth Downard and her husband Joseph. While Adam worked as a farm laborer, Nelson went to school.

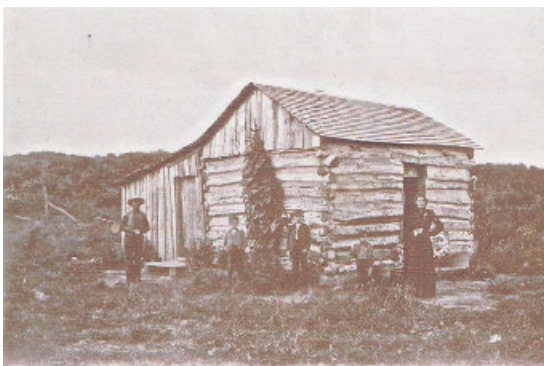
In the meantime, a young mother named Mary Jane Collins was raising two children, Martha Ellen (b. April 4, 1876) and William Amissa (b. July 25, 1879) alone in a home in Longs Creek, Iowa. When Martha was eight years old her mother married a local farmer named William Kirkpatrick and the family set up house in another location in Longs Creek. Before the Guy family moved to Terre Haute, the two families were neighbors.



Nelson Guy; *courtesy of Robert and Dorothy Sandmann*



Kirkpatrick/Collins homestead; *courtesy Robert and Dorothy Sandmann*



Kirkpatrick/Collins homestead (left), William and Martha Collins (right); *courtesy Robert and Dorothy Sandmann*



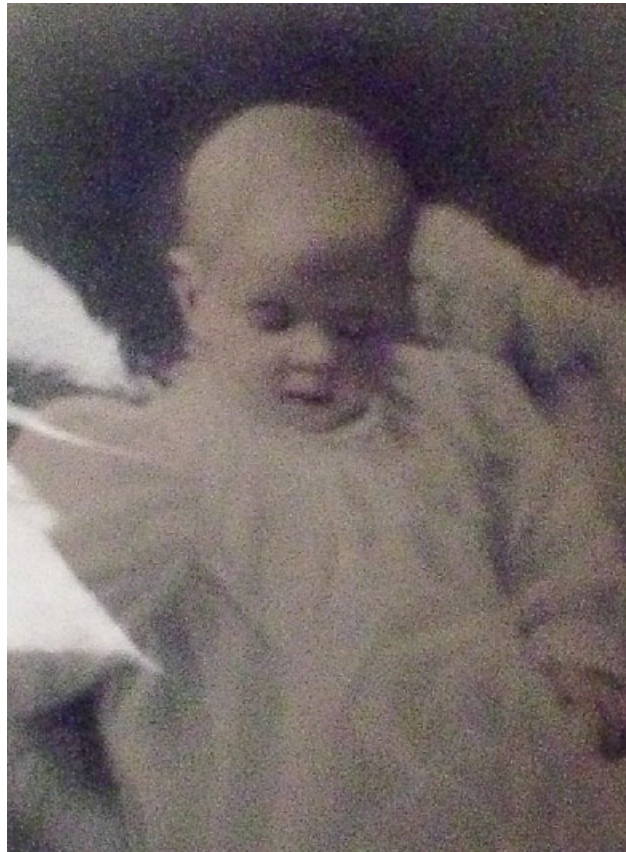
On September 15, 1891, Martha Collins and Nelson Guy were married. Nelson was 24 and Martha was only 15. The couple set up house in Longs Creek. Eight months after the marriage, Martha and Nelson's first child, Allie Eva, was born on May 4, 1892. Allie died just three months before her second birthday on February 23, 1894. However, Martha was a month into her second pregnancy and on October 3, 1894 a son, Benjamin Franklin, was born. Benjamin lived only seventeen days beyond his second birthday.



Wedding photo of Nelson and Martha Guy (above left), and William "Ed" and Fauvette "Betty" Guy (above right); *courtesy of Robert and Dorothy Sandmann*

The couple's third child, Fauvette Ella "Betty" Guy was born on August 18, 1897 in Deep Well, Hamilton County, Nebraska. Nelson had relocated his family to Deep Well and was working as a farm laborer to support the family. Martha's extended family lived with the couple which included Martha's brother William, her mother Mary Jane, and her five additional children with William Kirkpatrick: Frederick (b. September 1890), Nellie (b. August, 1892), Ora (b. January, 1894), Ada (b. January, 1897) and Dona (b. January, 1900). The home was a flurry of activity as both Martha and her mother were raising young children together in the same household. Seven months after Mary Jane gave birth to her last child Dona, Martha gave birth to a son, Walter Melvin (b. July 4, 1900). The baby boy lived for only three months and two days.

The cause of early death of three of Martha and Nelson's children is unknown, but it was common. From the years 1850-1890 infant mortality was 200 per 1,000 children, while neonatal (first 28 days of life) was 50 per 1,000. Causes of early mortality included infectious diseases such as diarrhea, diphtheria, scarlet fever, and tuberculosis caused by polluted water, unsafe milk supplies, and limited or no hygiene and sanitation. Louis Pasteur's breakthrough in bacteriology in the late 1880's would not be available as vaccines to the public for decades. Commercial remedies and medicines during this era often contained ingredients such as alcohol, cocaine, and opiates which made them ineffective and dangerous (Shulman 2003).



Death photo of Charles Raymond. It was not uncommon for bereaved parents to request photos of their deceased children before burial. Many would hang the photos on their walls in remembrance of the children they had lost; *courtesy of Robert and Dorothy Sandmann*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The practice of photographing the recently deceased is known as “memorial portraiture” and was a common practice in American culture during the nineteenth and early twentieth century “Mourning portraits” not only helped the family in grieving, but were often the only visual remembrance of the deceased and were among a family’s most precious possessions. Parents would hang “mourning portraits” on their living room walls along with photos of living children.



The Guys and Kirkpatrick's immigrated to Colorado in 1902, as did many Midwesterners around the turn of the 20th century. Agriculture, coal mining, and ranching were attracting many to the area. The Union Pacific Railroad plan to build rail lines through Fort Collins, and the construction of the first commercial sugar beet factory, caused the population to skyrocket from 3,053 residents to 8,210, an almost 170% increase between 1900 and 1910.

During the move to Colorado, Martha gave birth to a son, William "Ed" Guy (b. September 11, 1901). The families settled into a small home at 622 Smith Street in Fort Collins.

The extended family included Martha, her brother William, his wife Martha (nee Smith), their two daughters and William's mother-in-law. Nelson supported the family by working as a sewer and ditch laborer. While they were living on Smith Street, Martha gave birth to the couple's sixth child, Charles Raymond, on October 4, 1904. The celebration of a new baby would be short lived, as Charles died unexpectedly on August 29th the following year (Fort Collins Weekly Courier 1905).

Charles Raymond was buried at Phillips Cemetery in Hamilton County, Nebraska next to his older brother Walter Melvin (Vollnogle 2012).

In 1906, Martha purchased a home at 700 Colorado Street in Fort Collins, using her own resources. Along with Nelson and the two surviving children, Martha was adamant that her extended family also live with them. Nelson and Martha's last child together, Mary Belle, was born during this time on June 28, 1907.

In 1908, Nelson created a sewer trench digging business with a local resident named Loren Giddings. This was quite an accomplishment for a newcomer to the conservative town of Fort Collins. Loren Giddings' great aunt, Agnes Giddings, was the daughter of early pioneer Augustine Mason and was the first white child born in Fort Collins. Her father-in-law, Loren Giddings, was also a well-respected early settler, credited with helping build the town's financial structure through his successful agricultural enterprises. Giddings recognized Nelson's entrepreneurial spirit and together they created the Giddings and Guy Sewer and Trench business.



A sewer trench digger which Nelson Guy and Loren Giddings owned. Nelson is standing on the left. His son Ed is sitting below him; *courtesy Robert and Dorothy Sandmann*

1908 was a good year for Nelson. He had established himself within the close-knit community of Fort Collins, created his own business enterprise, and was looking north toward the chalk colored cliffs where he had heard a man could still own 160 acres for free.<sup>5</sup> Nelson decided to file a claim.

Nelson chose a central location in the Bristol Miner Precinct flanked between the two largest ranching operations in the area: the Warren Livestock Company to the north and the Lindenmeier Ranch to the west. It was situated just beneath and south of a rounded butte. The domed hill acted as a natural buffer from the relentless winds. Wire Draw, 300 yards to the east provided water in good years. Other than the ranch hands looking after the sheep and cattle on the prairie around his homesite, there were no other neighbors except John Grimm, a Warren ranch hand who homesteaded in an arroyo a quarter mile to the south, and a young bachelor coal miner named John Thompson. After living with Martha's extended family from the time of their marriage seventeen years prior, it was quite a change.

Nelson constructed the foundation of his new home out of granite stones and river rock located on the property. The foundation was at least three feet deep. From oral history reports provided from Nelson's descendants, the home was two stories tall with a cellar located to the east. The two-story home may have been constructed from 2 x 6 clapboard mill-lumbered pine which was popular at the time. Two lumber companies existed in Wellington: Forest Lumber Company and Gilcrest Lumber Company. It is possible that Nelson purchased the clapboard siding from one of these two businesses. The siding would have run horizontal from the foundation to the second floor, then vertical for the top floor. There is evidence of a corral to the west of the homestead (Sandmann 2012) (Jessen 2012).

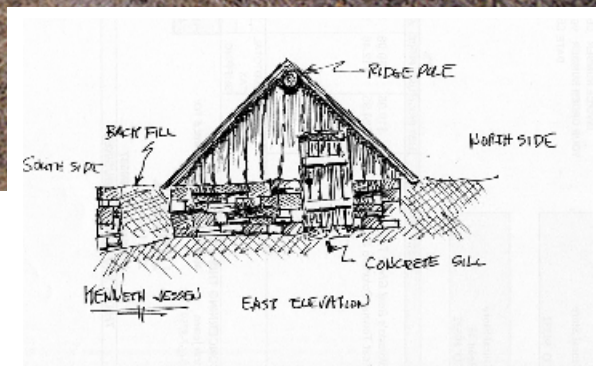
Newspaper articles, school records, and oral histories indicate that Nelson and Martha lived at the homestead and raised the three children there part-time from 1908 to 1912. The Homestead Act required them to live on the site for only six months of the year and records indicate they may have moved back and forth between the Colorado Street address in Fort Collins and the Bristol Miner homestead. Son Ed stayed with Nelson at the homestead and attended Soapstone Prairie Springs School located three miles to the north, while Fauvette attended school in Fort Collins. Artifacts at the homestead include a Model T automobile that may have been used by Nelson for commuting to Fort Collins. Oral history provided by Martha's ancestors relate that she never owned a driver's license and drove her buckboard wagon to get children to school and do business in Wellington.

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<sup>5</sup> With his term ending in less than a year, President Theodore Roosevelt was buying up land at a swift rate for conservation, and the wind-swept prairie to the north of town was some of the last land available for homesteading.



Remnants of the Guy homestead are visible below the domed hill amid overgrown mahogany and wheatgrass. Above right, river rock and limestone foundation used for the cellar at the homestead; *courtesy of Suzy Riding.*



Guy homestead site today (above); *courtesy Suzy Riding, illustration (right) by Kenneth Jessen*



Below is a photograph of Soapstone Prairie Springs School, which was in operation from 1908-1926. The boy in the top row farthest to the right is Ed Guy. This is evidence that he attended Soapstone Prairie Springs School at least from 1908-1912. Ed would have traveled to school by foot or by horseback.



Fauvette "Betty" Guy; *courtesy of Robert and Dorothy Sandmann*. Soapstone Prairie Springs School students; *courtesy of Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Dorothy Sandmann*

School records show that Fauvette attended school in Fort Collins and was on the honor roll for at least two years. Born in 1908, Mary Belle was too young to have attended school while the Guys were living at the homestead.

One year after filing a claim at Soapstone Prairie, Nelson's business with Loren Giddings folded. For the next three years, the family continued to live in town as well as on the homestead. From oral history, we know that Martha was an avid canner. She not only canned items from the garden, but was also known to can the rattles from the many prairie rattlers she killed with her shovel. The family would have experienced the grasshopper infestation of 1909, decimating the garden and crops. Nelson continued to work as a trench digger and laborer in town. Martha also brought in income as a laundry woman.

During this timeframe, Nelson purchased an innovative and expensive lighting system: calcium carbide. He mortgaged a quarter section of the land to pay for the carbide lights. However, calcium carbide lighting required two expensive and limited assets: water and money. As an older man, Ed Guy recalled his father purchasing the carbide lighting and related to Keith Roman that Nelson was swindled out of his land by a predatory carbide salesman (Martin 2009, 64) (Roman 2012).

Life on the homestead would come to an end in December 1912 when Nelson filed for divorce from Martha. The couple separated and Martha moved the children to the Colorado Street home in Fort Collins.

Nelson hired attorney Claude Coffin to represent him in the divorce. Coffin was an ardent arrowhead hunter and spent many hours with his brother Major Roy Coffin canvassing Soapstone Prairie for ancient artifacts. Nelson may have met Coffin while he and his brother were searching for evidence of the Folsom culture near his land. As one of the most talented lawyers in Fort Collins, Coffin was not cheap to hire. Ever the entrepreneurial, and as his descendants described him, "...always looking for the next deal," Nelson may have allowed Coffin to look for arrowheads on his land in exchange for legal services. Nelson asked for custody of the children, but as talented as an attorney as Coffin was, he lost the case.

On July 22, 1913, Nelson proved up on his homestead alone. His business had folded, he had lost forty acres of his land due to the bad carbide lighting investment, and he had lost his wife and children. He was now faced with limited income and child support payments. In 1917 Nelson made his final exodus out of Bristol Miner.

Nelson saddled his horse at the homestead and rode northeast over the bluffs toward Cheyenne. He then boarded a train bound for Nebraska where he had secured employment. It was the last time his family saw him alive. On July 1, 1924, Nelson's youngest daughter, Mary Belle, received a telegram informing her of her father's death in Kentucky. His funds were insuffi-

## NELSON A. GUY ASKS COURT FOR A DIVORCE

Late Saturday night Attorneys Carlson and Coffin filed a petition for divorce with the county court for Nelson A. Guy, well known in this city. The complaint charges Mrs. Martha L. Guy with adultery and in addition to the separation asks that the custody of three children be awarded to the plaintiff.

The Guys were married September 15, 1891. They have three children, Ella aged 15, William aged 11 and Mary Ellen aged 4. Mrs. Guy resides in this city.

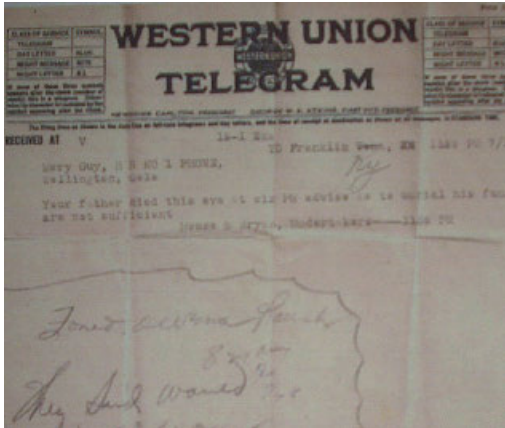
*Fort Collins Courier, 1912*



Last known photograph of Nelson Guy; courtesy of Robert and Dorothy Sandman



cient for his funeral. Ed traveled to Kentucky and retrieved their father's body, burying him in Phillips Cemetery in Hamilton County, Nebraska, next to Walter Melvin and Charles Raymond.



### Thompson Family 1909-1920s

160 Acres Issue Date September 3, 1914, Original Homestead Act of 1862

120 Acres Issue Date October 11, 1922, Original Homestead Act of 1862

145.32 Acres Issue Date June 26, 1919, Original Homestead Act of 1862

On September 28, 1906, John Thompson, a 25-year-old bachelor coal miner from Louisville, Colorado, filed an 1862 Homestead Act claim for 160 acres on Soapstone Prairie in the Bristol Miner precinct. Making good on his claim, he built a home that measured 8 feet X 10 feet. Thompson's only neighbors were the Romans, Italian brick layers to the east near Round Butte. Thompson worked for Colonel James Bulger's coal mines north of Wellington and ran cattle for the Buckeye cattle company. In 1908, Nelson Guy filed a claim at the bottom of the domed hill three miles north of Thompson's and eventually brought his family of four with him to inspect the property. Thompson and the Guys were apparently genial neighbors. John was described by family members as "always smiling." (Sandmann 2012).



John Thompson as a baby and in later years; *courtesy of Robert and Dorothy Sandmann*

Thompson lived on his land from approximately March to November of each year. He usually spent the winters in Louisville with his family. As required by the General Land Office, Thompson kept records of his progress so that when his due date of "proving up" approached he would be ready with the necessary paperwork. While 1913 was not a good year for Nelson Guy, it was very good for John Thompson. He had fulfilled the requirements of his claim, provided the proper paper work, and was awarded his certificate of ownership which he received the following year, on September 3, 1914.

N. 1/2 Sec. 24, 1906.  
 Established homestead March 15, 1907. Built a house 6 x 10 feet.  
 In a single man. Lived on land about 7 months in 1907, or until  
 the latter part of October, 1907.  
 Returned to the land the day before Thanksgiving, 1907, and re-  
 mained about one week.  
 Returned to the land in March, about the first, in 1908, and  
 remained until about October 10, 1908.  
 Returned to the land about the first of March, 1909, and re-  
 mained until October, 1909.  
 Returned to the land about the first of March, 1910, and remained until  
 December, 1910, when I went to school city, returning to the land  
 every week.  
 Returned to the land the last of January, 1911, and remained  
 there practically all the time until April 12 or 13, 1912, when my  
 house gave out.  
 CULTIVATION.  
 1907—planted about one acre for a garden.  
 1908—cultivated 2 acres—garden and corn.  
 1909—cultivated 4 acres—garden and oats.  
 1910—cultivated between 12 and 13 acres—garden, corn, beans  
 and millet—oats and barley.  
 1911—12 to 13 acres—same crops as 1910.  
 1912—12 to 13 acres in corn, oats and barley, and beans and  
 garden.  
 1913—millet, corn, oats and garden—12 acres.  
 Doubled the acre brush cut, set ten acres additional, and cut  
 hay out of this 10 acres.  
 IMPROVEMENTS.  
 S. 1/2 Sec. 24 and N. 1/2 Sec. 24 is fenced with 2 wire and post. Some  
 for 1/2 mile, and the balance 2 wire and post fence.  
 Two tile wells—one 12 feet, and the other 25 feet deep—water  
 in both wells—25 foot well is walled up about 2 feet. Both wells  
 saved in to some extent.  
 Had a 12 by 16 barn, which blew down in April, 1912, when the  
 house blew down.  
 Set out about 50 trees—of the box elder, willow and pecanary  
 variety—of which only four lived.

John Thompson's documentation for "proving up";  
 courtesy of Robert and Dorothy Sandmann

Thompson had become acquainted with the 6-foot tall, no-nonsense, Martha Guy. The two met while she drove her buckboard on her travels up and down County Road 15. In 1914, with her divorce proceedings from Nelson still pending, Martha filed a claim on a little over 145 acres, one section located to the southeast of Thompson's. John Thompson and Martha Guy were now neighbors. However, because of commitments the children had in town, Martha continued to spend most of her time at her home at 700 Colorado Street in Fort Collins. The Guys' divorce was close to being finalized and Nelson had left for Nebraska to find work in order to make child support payments.

On July 2, 1917, Martha and John Thompson were married. Martha was eight years older than Thompson, a divorcee, and had children, therefore Thompson's protective Scottish mother did not approve of the union. But it was Martha's beauty, strength, and intelligence that attracted him to her and the two were determined to make it work. (Sandmann 2012).

Martha kept her home on Colorado Street in Fort Collins but moved to Soapstone Prairie. The homestead was upgraded to adjust to Martha and her children. The home was built of adobe with a vaulted ceiling in the main room and kitchen to the east. A loft for beds was directly over the kitchen. The property also contained a spring house with two wells.



John and Martha's first child together, Martha M. Thompson, was born in June, 1919. The birth of their second daughter, Margie, followed five years later in 1924. And in 1928, at the age of 50, Martha gave birth to twins at Soapstone Prairie. The twins, Helen and Ellen were her last children. All four girls born at the Thompson homestead survived to adulthood. The household included children from her marriage to Nelson (Fauvette, Ed, and Mary Belle) along with the four daughters born to her and John, as well as a pitbull terrier named Buster (Sandmann 2012).



Martha M. and Margie Thompson at homestead (left), and the last of Martha's eleven children(right), twins Helen and Ellen, born at the homestead in 1926; courtesy Robert and Dorothy Sandmann.; *courtesy of Robert and Dorothy Sandmann*



Soapstone Prairie homesteader Martha Thompson with two of her daughters and buckboard wagon. Martha banked at the First National Bank in Wellington until 1928 and always drove her buckboard into town; *courtesy Robert and Dorothy Sandman*

John continued to work for the Tenney Coal Mine north of Wellington and to run cattle for both the Buckeye Land and Development Company and William Lindenmeier Jr. He also harvested a share of hay at the Goodwin Ranch at present day Red Mountain Open Space. Daughter Margie sold eggs in Carr, Colorado to help make ends meet.

A letter received by the Fort Collins Courier, written by Mary Belle Guy in 1919, provides a vivid description of life on the Thompson homestead:

*Wellington Girl's Corn and Pig Doing Fine*

The boys and girls in the club work (sic) are very enthusiastic about the outlook for this year. Many remarks have been made concerning their progress but few of them have written to the Club Leader concerning it. Following is a letter from Mary Guy who lives near Wellington and is raising a patch of corn and a pig in the clubs in her neighborhood.

Wellington, Colo., July 12, 1919.

Mr. Hill:

Will answer your letter I received quite a while ago including corn club record, and was glad to receive it. I am taking good care of it because I want it to be nice and clean.

My corn is doing better than I expected, because we did not have any rain on it until the 3rd and then we had an awful large rain, it made it come right up, part of it is five or six inches high and part of it is just coming through the ground. I have just got through hoeing it yesterday. It is hard hoeing it now because I have to be so careful to keep from cutting it off.

I had some up before the heavy rain came and washed it all out for me. The only trouble is now that I am afraid it won't mature because it is so late. I planted it by hand. Took the marker and marked it both ways and then took the hand planter and put it in.

My pig is doing fine. She sure is tame. She follows me all over the place. When I go after the cows, I have to slip away from her to get the horse, then I have to got to be quiet so she won't hear or see me because if she does she would start right out after me as fast as she could run.

Once when I went after the cows, I couldn't slip away from her, and so I got on the horse and went as fast as I could go and she right after me squealing as hard as she could. When I got out of sight and she couldn't see me any longer, she stood still a while and then she turned around and ran as fast as she could to the house.

She is so long that she won't go into a large gunny sack without her head sticking out. She is very broad across the back. She weighs 100 pounds. I think that



is pretty well. She just gets one pound of corn a day and 1 ½ pounds of oats a day and 1 ½ gallon of milk and water a day for her meals. I borrowed Mr. Roger's scales to weigh her. She is running around in the yard. I would like for you to see her.

I would have written sooner but have been so busy taking care of my pig and other pets.

What day does the boys and girls club news leave Fort Collins?

Well, I will close hoping to hear from you soon. Yours truly,

MARY GUY

Wellington

## WELLINGTON GIRL'S CORN AND PIG ARE DOING FINE

The boys and girls in the club work are very enthusiastic about the outlook for this year. Many remarks have been made concerning their progress but few of them have written to the Club Leader concerning it. Following is a letter from Mary Guy who lives near Wellington and is raising a patch of corn and a pig in the clubs in her neighborhood:

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What day does the boys' and girls' club news leave Fort Collins?

Well, I will close hoping to hear from you soon. Yours truly,

MARY GUY,  
Wellington.

*Fort Collins Courier 1919*

The isolation of the prairie didn't deter Martha from keeping her children active in community affairs. The article provided below regards a play that Mary Belle was in for the Sweet Briar's Club.

Martha never owned a driver's license and used her buckboard wagon to drive her children to the Buckeye and Boxelder schools, as well as run errands in Wellington.

Martha is described by her descendants as the epitome of the pioneer woman (Sandmann 2012). At six feet tall, Martha was a large intimidating woman. According to her family, she was no-nonsense type of woman. If you were meeting Martha for the first time, she would size you up and figure out whether she liked you or not. Martha canned everything including rattlesnake rattles. The prairie hadn't necessarily hardened her, but had honed her instincts. Her generous nature extended beyond the Bristol Miner. She was an excellent host throughout her life and made sure that family celebrations included everyone.

♦ ♦ ♦

**Pretty Play**  
**At Y. W. C. A.**  
 A spring playlet entitled "What is Her Name?" was given by the Sweet Briar club of The Girl Reserves of Y. W. C. A. Thursday afternoon in Colonial hall. The following is the cast of characters:  
 Spring—Sarah Reingold.  
 Pine tree—Noel Brown.  
 Winter—Lydia Batt.  
 Wind—Helen Cleave.  
 Crows—Dorothy Jones.  
 Daffodil—Mary Guy.  
 Pansy—Bertha ~~Thompson~~.  
 Butterflies—Hazel and Lura Webster.



Fort Collins Courier 1921 (left), and Helen, Ellen, and Martha near wagon; Martha M. and Margie at table; *courtesy of Robert and Dorothy Sandmann*



♦ ♦ ♦

**Surprise Party**  
**In District No. 55**  
 On February 5 at the home of Mr. and Mrs. John Thompson in district No. 55 a delightful surprise party was arranged in honor of Mrs. Sylvester Wisely and Frank Wooster, whose birthdays come at this time. A large number of friends gathered in the morning and the day was spent pleasantly. Many gifts were presented to Mrs. Wisely. When dinner was served covers were laid for forty-three and a bountiful meal was served. Those present included Mr. and Mrs. Wood and son Edwell; Mr. and Mrs. Byerly and daughter Bessie; Mrs. Wisely and children William, Sydney, Jerry, Margaret, Richard, Rhoda and Dora May; Mr. and Mrs. Thompson and children Edward Mary and Martha; Mr. Roman and children, Margaret, Domenick and Philip; Mrs. Ashburn and children, Hilda, Robert and Marian; Frank Wooster; George Wolf; Miss Maud Rider; Nelson Harp; Miss Marian Crosser; Inez Bear, Lila Ball, Rena Ball, Edward Blackmore, Carl Moak, Claude Gilman, Paul Gilman, Dudley Bear, W. F. Gay of Loveland.

Get together at the Thompson homestead; *courtesy of Robert and Dorothy Sandmann*

*Fort Collins Courier 1922*

In 1928, John and Martha began to experience the first symptoms of the Great Depression. Work stopped and unemployment and poverty spread in the Bristol Miner area. At the Soapstone Prairie homestead, Maxwell and Nash automobiles, and horses and wagons circled their home as the Thompsons watched as all their belongings were auctioned off. They sold everything from a shovel (35 cents) to a team of prize mules (\$202.50.) and returned to Martha's home on Colorado Street. John was able to find employment as both a farmer and road laborer. The Thompsons kept the homesteading property until the 1940s when they sold it to the Warren Livestock Company and the Munroe family cattle business.

Described as sweet and full of laughter, twin Ellen Thompson gave birth to a baby boy, Jack, when she was 16 years old. Martha raised Jack in Fort Collins at the Colorado Street address while Ellen found work in California and New Mexico. Helen graduated from Fort Collins High School with academic scholarships and married Albert Sandmann. The son of Helen and Albert Sandmann, Robert, currently lives in Loveland, Colorado with his wife Dorothy. The information Robert and Dorothy generously provided was crucial in re-telling this extraordinary story.



John Thompson died in 1953 at the age of 69 and was buried in Grandview Cemetery in Fort Collins. Martha lived another 17 years. In the years after her marriage as a child bride to Nelson Guy, Martha gave birth to eleven children, buried four of them, fearlessly battled drought, wind and isolation on the prairie for two decades, lived through the Depression, while caring for her children and grandchildren. On her death bed, just a few months shy of her 95th birthday, Martha told her family, "I'm tired, I'm ready to go home." Martha returned "home" on December 17, 1970 and was buried at Roselawn Cemetery in Fort Collins.

John and Martha in later years at the home, 700 Colorado Street, Fort Collins; *courtesy Robert and Dorothy Sandmann.*

## **Robert and Margaret Ashburn 1910-1936**

160 Acres Issue Date May 20, 1915 Original Homestead Act of 1862

Margaret Liddle was born in Houghton Le Spring, Durham, England on June 13, 1881, to John Liddle and Margaret Spence. In 1899, at 18 years old, she married Robert Ashburn in Tynemouth, Northumberland, England. Robert was 23 years old. Following the birth of their first daughter, Hilda, the couple immigrated to the United States in 1901. Robert found work as a miner in the coal fields of Boulder, Colorado. Two years after their arrival, another daughter, Gladys, was born, followed by a son, Robert Jr., in 1909. While living in Boulder, the Ashburns were neighbors of the Thompson family who were also coal miners and of Scottish descent. The Thompsons' second oldest son, John, homesteaded at Soapstone while working as a coal miner for the Bulger mines. The Ashburns followed John Thompson to the Bristol Miner in 1910 and filed a claim adjacent to Thompsons' near Round Butte. The Ashburns also maintained a residence in Cheyenne, Wyoming where son Leonard was born in 1918 and daughter Margaret in 1921.

By the mid-1920s, the Ashburns had separated. Margaret was raising the children alone at the homestead for a short time, while Robert worked in Cheyenne. She is one of two single mothers at Soapstone Prairie during this time period. Daughter Gladys married a Warren Livestock Company cowboy named John Grimm on October 11, 1921, and began raising a family in an arroyo a mile northwest of her mother. In April of 1922, a community birthday party was held in the Bristol Miner for local homesteader, Martha Thompson. The Fort Collins Courier provided a list of the participants of the celebration which included the widower Tony Roman and the recently separated Margaret Ashburn. Three years later, in the same month her divorce from Robert was final, Margaret married Tony Roman. Margaret and her daughter Margaret moved in with Tony and four of his sons. Robert continued living in Laramie as a pipe fitter for the railroad. Margaret's sons, Robert Jr. and Leonard, were living together near their mother while Robert Jr. worked as a bus driver. Robert was 21 years old, Leonard was 12 years old. Leonard died unexpectedly in 1933 at the age of 16 and is buried at Grandview Cemetery in Fort Collins (District No 55 1922).

By 1940, Robert Jr. was married and living in Bristol Miner with wife, Mary, and one year-old daughter, Lois Marie. Tony and Margaret Roman had divorced by this time. Again a bachelor, Tony lived alone at the homestead. Margaret died on January 14, 1947. She was buried in Grandview Cemetery by son Robert Jr. Robert Sr. passed away on February 9, 1961 and Robert Jr. on March 17, 1995. Both were 86 years old and both are buried at Grandview Cemetery.



## **Grimm Family 1910-1932**

160 Acres Issue Date May 20, 1915, Original Homestead Act of 1862

160 Acres Issue Date November 13, 1919, Original Homestead Act of 1862

The following narrative was written by Mildred Grimm Jones, daughter of John and Gladys Grimm. Mildred was raised on a homestead at Soapstone Prairie. Bobbi Grimm Grant is credited with providing the narrative.

*John (Shorty) Grimm, a long time resident of Larimer County, was born at Galion, Ohio February 19, 1877. His parents had immigrated from Germany. As a young man John worked on farms, and then went on to Chicago, Illinois, where his brother George lived. There he worked in an ink plant for a while. He went on to travel throughout much of the "West." He came to Colorado in 1907 and began working for the Warren Livestock Company, located near the Colorado-Wyoming border.*

*In 1908 he began to "homestead" a ½ section or 320 acres of land which was located in the Round Butte area, which is about 10 miles north of Buckeye and 25 miles north of Fort Collins, CO. He then began to build a home, which he dug into a hillside. All work was done by hand which was hard and time consuming, digging, mixing concrete, etc.*

*Robert and Margaret Ashburn came to this country from Ashington, England in 1901 and homesteaded in this area in 1911. John married their daughter Gladys in October of 1921. John and Gladys had three children, Mildred Frances Jones, Anna Elizabeth Loader and John Allen Grimm.*

*During that time there was a lot of activity and settlement of the area and several schools had been built, but as the years went by, people began to move because of drought and lack of ground water. The schools could not be supported and were therefore closed. By 1929 when John's children were ready to start school, they had to be transported to the Buckeye school. John drove a school bus, (his car), for a time. Jobs were not plentiful at this time, but he did work for some of the farmers near Buckeye, or for some of the companies exploring for oil and gas in the area, when that work was available. Most of this area is now in one large holding, used for grazing land.*

*In 1932, John realized he could no longer maintain his family there and moved to Fort Collins. In 1938 he purchased a home west of town. John died in 1959, but Gladys still lives in the family home. Mildred Jones and Anna Loader still live in Fort Collins. John Allen and his family moved to Canada in 1970 and live near Quensnel, B.C.*



John Grimm, a 32-year-old ranch hand for the Warren Livestock Company, filed a claim on an arroyo a half mile south of the Guys' homestead. Grimm lived at the homestead by himself while working as a farm laborer. On September 12, 1918, at 41 years old John registered for the WWI draft through a local board located in Laramie, Wyoming. His draft card described him as small but stout, with blue eyes and brown hair.



John Grimm (back row, third from left) during his ranching days, and Grimm family 1930, possibly taken from homestead. From L to R-Gladys, John Jr., Anna, John Sr., Mildred; *courtesy Bobbi Grimm Grant*

John Grimm remained a bachelor until 1921, when at the age of 44, he married 20 year-old Gladys Ashburn. Gladys was the daughter of homesteader Margaret Ashburn. John and Gladys Grimm's children were Mildred, was born in 1922, followed by Anna in 1924 and son, John, in 1926. Grimm family history recounts that Anna was born in the back of a Model A in Wellington, Colorado. All three children were raised in the arroyo below the bluffs south of the Guy property until Anna was in the 5th grade.

Mildred Grimm Hixon recalls the hardships they endured at the homestead:

*There wasn't much ranching to be done. We had a little: a few livestock and raised a garden, but there was very little subsistence or money coming in. We were very poor. She would can, make jellies and stuff. Chokecherries, pick chokecherries along the creek bank, and she would make chokecherry jelly, and of course she didn't have pectin so it didn't set up very well, so we would use it for pancakes. We loved that! Chokecherry syrup! And vegetable soups, and she would cook beans, make a big pot of beans, things like that. That we could get by with very little money to buy a lot of groceries. Well, that was one way he kind of made money at different times. He would sell off his oil rights, some of the oil rights that we had on the homestead.... Yeah, my father always lived in hopes that they would find oil up there some day (Martin 2009, 66).*

Anna Grimm Loader added that their mother, Gladys, canned a lot and made good apple pie. “She didn’t have a variety of foods, but she was very good with what she did.” (Martin 2009, 66).

Mark Loader, John Grimm’s great grandson, told of the challenges homesteaders faced while trying to live off the land and support their families:

*Anything to make a living: trapping, ranching – as far as sheepherder, gardening, anything he could to make a living. A prospector, he was the epitome of the ‘49ers. Always carried a pick in his pocket, digging rocks out of a mine up Rist Canyon that he prospected right up until he was too old to do anything.... Grandpa did a little trapping. It wasn’t a big part. But it was anything to supplement the income. It’s like coyotes, and an occasional mountain lion and of course bobcat. Both of those are real common to the area. And then skunks. And I heard about, after mentioning skunks, him making soap using the fat of the skunk–facial soap. I know that they drilled like some test wells on Grandpa’s property, and I don’t know exactly where, but it was off to the east of the draw. And he swears he went over there and there was oil dripping off the bit, you know, the drill bit. And then in the middle of the night they all packed up and left. And there was always speculation that they found oil, but for whatever reason the big companies bought them off, or to develop it at that time, and they just abandoned everything. People were more content with less. You know, there wasn’t the knowledge and the availability of all the things. I always remember talking to Grandma, and talking about the “good ol’ days”. And she said, you know, I don’t remember them as being “good ol’ days” because she says, basically everything was a struggle. Everything you cooked, everything you ate, you grew it, prepared it, from bottom to top and did so, often, without (Martin 2009, 66-67).*

Local homesteader and author, Charles Phillips also recalls hunting on the prairie in his manuscript *Dryland Diaries*. “Hunting on the drylands was the way of life especially in the Depression of the late twenties and early thirties. In the winter months, after the morning chores were done, we would start hunting. It takes four white-tailed jackrabbit skins to weigh a pound. They were worth 50 cents a pound.”

In the mid-1930s, a flood roared through Wire Draw and washed out a garden the Grimms had worked so hard to cultivate. The family made the decision to leave Soapstone Prairie. Mildred Grimm recalls the experience.

*(The flood) didn’t wash out the dugout, because the garden was near the creek and it was quite a distance from where we lived. But ... we had a beautiful, flourishing garden and it just washed it all away, so we felt like there just wasn’t much for us to stay there anymore. The family felt like there just wasn’t much for them to stay there anymore.” (Martin 2009, 66).*

The Grimm family relocated to Fort Collins and eventually Laporte, Colorado, where John was fortunate to find employment as a laborer with the Works Progress Administration, one of President Franklin Roosevelt's programs to generate incomes for U.S. citizens during the Depression. (1940 United States Federal Census for John Grimm n.d.)



Grimm family 1930s (above left) L to R-Mildred, Anna, John Sr., John Jr., Gladys and in 1937 (above right) L to R-Mildred, John Sr., John Jr., Gladys, Anna; *courtesy Bobbi Grimm Grant*

John Grimm passed away on September 10, 1959, and is buried in Grandview Cemetery in Fort Collins. Gladys lived another 33 years after John's death. She passed away on October 16, 1992, two months shy of her 90th birthday. Anna Loader passed away on June 30, 2007, at the age of 83. Anna's sons Neil and Mark Loader reside in Fort Collins with their families. Her grandson Brad Loader lives in Oregon. Mildred Grimm celebrated her 95th birthday in 2017 and still lives in Fort Collins. Jeannie Fleury lives with her family in Denver, Colorado.



John Grimm in the late 1940s (left); *courtesy Jeannie Fleury*, John, 1950s (center); *courtesy Jeannie Loader*, and with his grandchildren; *courtesy Bobbi Grimm Grant*

## **Bear 1919-1961**

320 Acres Issue Date March 3, 1922 Original Homestead Act of 1862

320 Acres Issue Date March 3, 1922 Stock Raising Act of 1916

At a junction between the Mahogany and Pronghorn trails on Soapstone Prairie, visitors may see several structures nestled beneath a mahogany-dotted bluff. The location is an amalgam of old structures intermixed with modern buildings. More than a century before the City of Fort Collins acquired the property, this location was filled with the laughter of the six children who were raised here, the whoops and hollers from ranch hands who brought in the cattle every May, and on weekends, the sounds of a violin playing an Irish tune, and guests dancing. This is the Bear homestead.

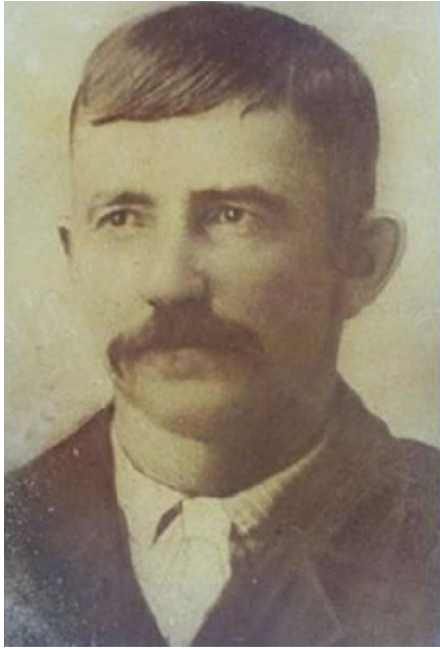


*Bear homestead; courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton*

George Washington Bear began homesteading this site in approximately 1917. George was born in Illinois on June 5, 1863. Orphaned when his parents were killed in a train accident, at the age of seven he was adopted in Iowa by a homesteader. George was delivered to the Midwest by the New York-based Children's Aid Society which placed over 200,000 inner-city orphans into mid-western foster homes between 1853 and 1930. When it was discovered that George's first adopted parent was abusing him, a local man named Ben James, stepped in to take him under his wing. Ben James was a cousin of the famous outlaw gang leaders, Frank and Jesse James. Although, Ben James tried to keep his adopted son far from the influences of his vigilante cousins, the gang did frequent the home in which George was raised. Young George successfully escaped the seduction of the James Gang escapades and grew up learning the trade of farming (National Orphan Train Complex n.d.) (Cathy Vlasak 2012).



In 1888, at the age of 24, George met Lettie Downs, the 19-year-old daughter of an Irish immigrant. The two were married in Imperial, Nebraska. The couple moved to Grand Island, Nebraska, where the first three of their children were born: Ward Berten “Bert,” (August 11, 1889) Guy Raymond “Ray” (October 3, 1892), and Clara (December 24, 1893).



George and Lettie Bear; courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton

In 1896, George and Lettie moved to Fort Collins, Colorado. George and his young sons traveled by foot, while Lettie, pregnant with their fourth child, rode the train with 3-year-old daughter, Clara.

George Bear’s grandson, Leo Fenton tells about the move to Colorado:

*George Washington Bear married my grandmother in Grand Island, Nebraska. Her name was Lettie Downs. They were married and farmed in Nebraska about two years. And decided to come to Colorado ... Grandpa wanted to homestead a farm out here for which he and his two sons and an oldest daughter come out with the machinery and the two teams of horses that he owned ... And they walked from Grand Island to Fort Collins. And then my grandmother was pregnant with her fourth child and she rode the train. And he had her brought up by stage to Fort Collins and met her there. He had bought a farm out east of Fort Collins, which he had nearly paid for. He’d started during the Potato Famine in Ireland, and they had great wages, great earnings from the potatoes that they grew in this part of the country, shipped to Ireland (Martin 2009, 57).*

The family first lived near Severance, Colorado, where Lettie's father, David Downs, had moved six years earlier. Between 1900 and 1910, the family lived in Township 7 in Fort Collins, which today is located near the east end of Harmony Road. George worked as a farm laborer while Lettie raised the children, which included six additional children: Hazel (b. September 1895), Walter (b. August 1898), Gladys (b. 1901), George Earl (b. 1903), Herbert Bruce (b. 1906) and Inez (b. 1908).

With his family increasing, George began to look for a larger piece of property. Newspaper articles from 1912 place the Bear family in the Waverly and Wellington area spending time with friends or family. While visiting Wellington, George learned about land available for homesteading in the northern hills of the Bristol Miner Precinct. George selected a location with a running spring beneath some bluffs, three miles south of the Wyoming border and filed a claim with the General Land Office.

George worked full time as a farmer in Fort Collins during the day. In the evenings and on weekends he would return to the Bristol Miner to work on the family's new home. George's grandson, Leo Fenton retells the challenges his grandfather faced while building the homestead.

*He heard of one piece of ground up on the Soapstone Prairie that was still open for homesteading. He started to prove up on this one piece of ground. This is an area close to the Lindenmeier dig, east of the Lindenmeier dig, right at the base of the Cheyenne Ridge. It's got a wonderful spring there. He had two Sundays off. He worked six days a week, two weeks out of the month, and seven days a week the rest of the time. He had to work 'til sundown and Saturday night, he would come home, get in his wagon, his children would have his horses harnessed and hooked to the wagon. He would go to the homestead and build on his house so he could start proving up on the house. He would go up on one Sunday, build some, come back the next Sunday, it had blown down. He come back the next Sunday and build it again and again and again. For three months this went on. That fall he moved his whole family up there." (Martin 2009, 74).*

The actual date that the Bears moved to the Soapstone Prairie homestead is unconfirmed. Letters sent by George, Lettie and the children to brothers Ray and Bert were written from a Wellington address and postmarked 1914. A 1917 Wellington City directory lists George and Lettie as residents. However, oral history passed down through the family dates the move to Soapstone Prairie in 1918. It is possible that the family was in transition to the Wellington address (Bristol Miner) between 1914 and 1918.

Six of the Bears' eleven children were raised at the homestead, which included two additional children: Merle Dudley (b. 1911) and Evelyn Virginia (b. 1915). Lettie's oldest daughter, Clara, helped deliver Evelyn.

No 1

Wellington Colorado May 14<sup>1914</sup>  
 I bet how are you  
 this Rainy weather we are  
 like a lot of melted ducks  
 working Round here I have  
 got 6 acres of Beets in and got 2  
 days of plowing to do for Barley  
 and 5 or 6 more to plow for Beets  
 people can't get half of there  
 crops in because it is  
 hard to work the wheat and  
 oats that is here planted  
 up well we are running a Plow  
 when we can and it is  
 raining we work it done and  
 the Rain shall together and  
 work grainy and better and  
 today the more that Ray  
 bought you fellows in a  
 matter turn a home got  
 one of the Rubens Plow

Letter from George Bear to son Bert. The address he provides is Wellington, Colorado and the date May 14, 1914

Highlights of the letter include:

- Planting six acres of beets.
- Planning on plowing another 5 1/2 acres for beets.
- Has a day of plowing for barley.
- Mentions that other farmers have not been able to get their crops planted because it has been so wet.
- Wheat and oats are up nice.
- Mentions working with a team of horses.

Courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton

Handwritten note by a family member recording the births of the children born to George and Lettie Bear; courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton

Born to Lettie & George Bear

Ward Benton	Aug 11 - 1889
Long Raymond	Oct 3 - 1891
Clara Maude	Dec 24 - 1893
Hazel Fern	Feb 18 - 1896
Walter Willie	Aug 2 - 1898
Gladys Luthada	Nov 27 - 1900
George Earl	Dec 12 - 1902
Robert Bruce	Sept 21 - 1905
Ernest Viola	Mar. 8 - 1908
Martin Dudley	Sept 30 - 1910
Evelyn Virginia	Feb - 1 - 1915

George Washington Bear  
 married  
 Lettie Luthada Bours  
 Oct 26 - 1888  
 J.W. Bear born Jan. 5 - 1863  
 J.L. Bours " Sept 9 - 1869



Top: Dudley and Evelyn at the homestead (left). A portrait photo of Evelyn at right.

Middle: Dudley, George Washington Bear, Evelyn and mother Lettie Bear (left). Herbert Bruce and Evelyn at homestead (center). Teenager Dudley Bear, far left, looks mesmerized by these dapper cow-punchers of the Warren Livestock Company circa 1930 (right).

Bottom: Walter and Inez Bear (left). Studio portrait of Inez Bear (right). *All photos this page courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton*

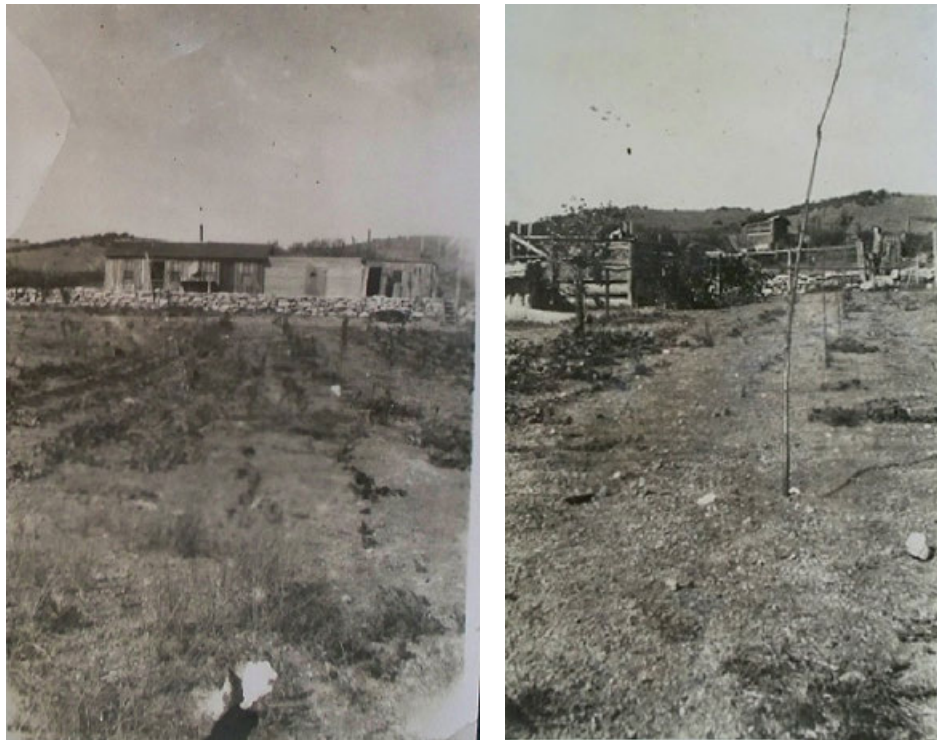


The family lived at the homestead for twelve years from approximately 1917 to 1929. George raised horses and cattle. A round up was held each year on May 1, to bring in the cattle for branding.

The Bears were fortunate to have a natural spring at the homestead. A hose was run from the spring to the home which allowed fresh water for cooking and cleaning. The remainder was funneled into a cistern outside to irrigate the garden. The accessibility of the running spring was crucial to the Bears' ability to survive.

Grandson Leo Fenton provides this description of the homestead:

*There was farmland as you come in. There was probably 60, 70 acres of land that they raised corn on. The rest of it was grassland. There was a hill, the road come in from the south, and right at the base of the ridge itself, they had leveled that off and my grandfather built the house right there. There was quite a bunch of American elm trees that was to the west and north of the house. And then back in amongst these trees was a spring. And the spring was boxed and they had piped it right down to the house. They had running in the house and also then it come on through and went into a tank just on the south side of the house, and they kept this tank full at all times. And this is how my grandmother irrigated the garden. And then also the water run from the tank in overflow out of the tank and in to another pipe, went down into the corrals to water the livestock.”* (Martin 2009, 58)



Need description for photo (left), and view from the sound end of the garden looking directly north (right); courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton



Bear homestead from the top of the hill above the home looking southwest;  
*courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton*



Looking towards the homestead from the south (left), and south-facing door to homestead  
(right); *courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton*



Current view looking north toward the homestead; *courtesy Suzy Riding.*





At left is Mary Blanchard who taught at Soapstone Prairie Springs School in 1924. At right, Evelyn and teacher Mary Phillips; *courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton*



Above left, Dudley, Gladys, Inez, Lettie and Evelyn. Right is Mary Phillips in the front garden of the Bear's home. Mary lived with the Bears while she taught at the school. Mary was the last teacher at Soapstone Prairie Springs School before it closed in 1926; *courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton*

Four of the Bear children attended Soapstone Springs School, located a mile to the southwest of the homestead. This rural school existed from approximately 1908 to 1926. George Bear was the president of the school, which usually had no more than six students at a time. Although there were several teachers who taught there, the two who would have taught the Bear children were Mary Blanchard and Mary Phillips. Mary Phillips lived with the Bears the last year of her teaching career at Soapstone. Evelyn Bear was the last child to attend the school.



Newspaper articles and oral history reflect that George Bear was known as a kind and generous man. He also had a sense of humor. When George Sr. lost an eye due to a firecracker accident at the homestead, it was replaced with a glass eye. To humor his children, he would set the glass eye on the table in front of them and before walking out of the room would warn them, "Okay, you better behave. I've got an eye on you!" (Cathy Vlasak 2012)

"Two One-Eyed Georges" George Sr.(right) and son George Earl (left). Both Georges only had only one eye. George Sr. lost his in a firecracker accident; George Earl lost his when he stepped on rake at the homestead; *courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton*

George Bear, usually a most pleasant sort of fellow, is somewhat of a "sore head" these days. Somewhat of a talker, too, George is, for him, unusually quiet. To be sure there's a reason, or rather, several of them. George was suffering with ulcerated teeth. The teeth were lanced but to date, are still sore enough to keep George listed with the quiet ones.

(Fort Collins Courier 1922)

The article reads:

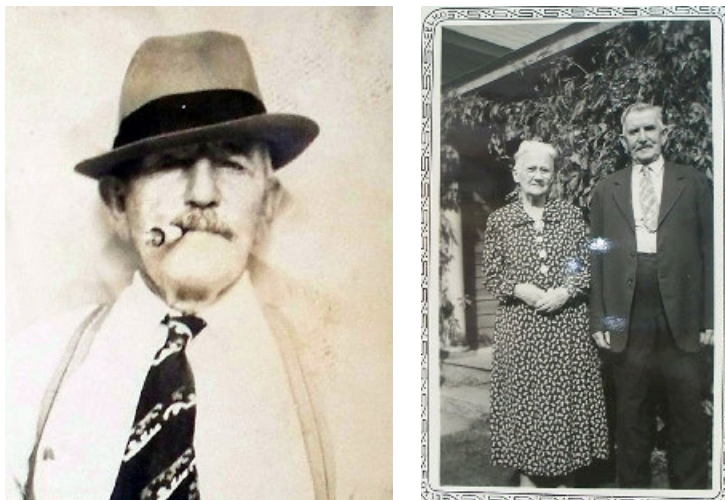
George Bear, usually a most pleasant sort of fellow, is somewhat of a "sore head" these days. Somewhat of a talker too. George is, for him, unusually quiet. To be sure there's a reason or several of them. George was suffering with ulcerated teeth. The teeth were lanced but to date are still sore enough to keep George listed with the quiet ones.



Below is an excerpt of a newspaper article regarding George Bear dated September 23, 1922. The half-Irish Lettie Downs was described by her family as quiet and strong. Her children called her a loving mother. In 1928, the impending Depression caused enormous stress on the residents of the Bristol Miner Precinct. In their 50s, George and Lettie decided it was time to leave the Bristol Miner. George purchased a bungalow at 620 South Sherwood Street in Fort Collins and the family moved back to town in 1929.

Leo Fenton adds his recollections of the move to Fort Collins:

*It's kind of unexplainable, unless you was a kid there at the time. But it gave you a feeling of real freedom that I've never experienced anywhere else, never. A freedom of expression, a freedom of being with nature, it was just a good place to be. And my grandparents were very loving people. My grandfather was a great tease, and my grandmother was a very loving woman. I didn't know her as well as I liked to have. I think eleven children and living up there, and she hated it – always. She hated that place. She never did like it. And she was ready to move long before grandpa decided to sell out.” (Martin 2009, 51).*



George in his later years; left. At right, with Lettie at the 620 Sherwood Street address; courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton

The homestead continued to flourish and provide an income for the family for the next 32 years, under the hard work of the two oldest brothers, Bert and Ray Bear.

The inseparable Bert and Ray were described by family members and friends as “The Poet” and “The Warrior.” The oldest of the eleven children, Bert was quiet and soft spoken while Ray was more vocal and known for his colorful language.

Before taking over the homestead the brothers were living in Waverly where they played for the Waverly baseball team and attended dances. From approximately 1910 to 1920, Bert and Ray worked for Catherine “Lady Moon” Lauder, running the stage coach from Fort Collins to Log Cabin, Colorado, near Red Feather Lakes.



A rare photo of the famous but elusive cattle rancher Catherine “Lady Moon” Lauder with the Bear brothers while running a stage from Fort Collins to Log Cabin, Colorado, ca.1917. The man at the reins is possibly Frank Potts, Lady Moon’s adopted son. He died in the fall of 1917 from complications from surgery. Bert is on the left front, Ray on the right; *courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton*



Guy Raymond (Ray) Bear at left, Ward Berten (Bert) Bear, center, and “The Poet” Bert is on the left in the photo at right while “The Warrior” Ray is on the right. This photo was taken at the homestead. Family members recall that neither Bert nor Ray were over 5’5” and both wore large hats to make them look taller; *courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton*





*go out there with their wagon and horse and they'd pick it by hand. Once they wore their palms out on their gloves they'd turn them around and wore the backs out. They wore them backwards! They wore everything backwards until everything was nothing but a hairnet, you know. And even their overalls, they'd turn them around and wear them backwards until the backs wore out. We drove up there that one day, and they were so terribly busy picking corn. And shame on my father; he drove up and they didn't see us, and he honked the horn. And it's a wonder they didn't both have a heart attack, because you know, out there nowhere, and they're picking corn, and they got kind of miffed, and I don't blame them because you shouldn't do that."* (Martin 2009, 58-59).

In the 1950s, a herd of mustangs ran wild on Soapstone Prairie. Traveling down the valley from the location of today's Mahogany Trail above the Bear homestead, they enjoyed the salt lick Ray Bear would set out for them. Ray's niece, Renee Schnorr, remembers visiting when the horses would race down the ravine for the salt lick. Her protective uncle Ray would scold her, "You get inside now! That stallion will kill you!" Fascinated, Renee would watch the horses from the safety of the homestead. Additional oral history records this herd roaming the ponderosa grove at Soapstone Prairie.



Ray on his horse with best friend "Jack" looking on. The Bear family recalls that the brothers loved their livestock like children. Ray is looking west at the camera towards where the wild mustang herd would come to lick the salt he would set out for them; *courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton*

The brothers entertained themselves by making full length horse hair jackets and homemade chokecherry wine. They were also known to be very generous. When invited to social functions or parties, Bert would bring chocolates and a bouquet of sweet peas he'd picked from his garden, while Ray would bring a bottle of the homemade chokecherry wine. The wine was of a very good quality and, as Blehm relates, it had a "zing" to it. Leo Fenton provided Bert and Ray's wine recipe as told to him by Ray Bear:



*Use a pound of fruit to a pound of sugar to a gallon of water, plus a cake of yeast with each two gallons of water. Keep adding and let it set.*

*Fenton adds, "Now my uncles crushed the berries, I don't. I leave 'em in whole. I make one batch of wine off the berries when they're still whole, and then I crush 'em and make a second batch. And believe it or not that is a more potent wine than the first one. The first batch is a real fruity sweet wine. But the next batch is sweet, but it's got a lot more alcohol. We always made it in a crock because my uncles always made it in a crock. They stored it in a wooden keg – I never did have the keg.*

*Let it go until it has a cake of the fruit on top and stir that every day. Then when the cake settles to the bottom it is time to set it off. Dip it off and let it set again. Siphon it off so that none of the sediment in the bottom gets in the finished wine. Strain it through cloth to refine it.*



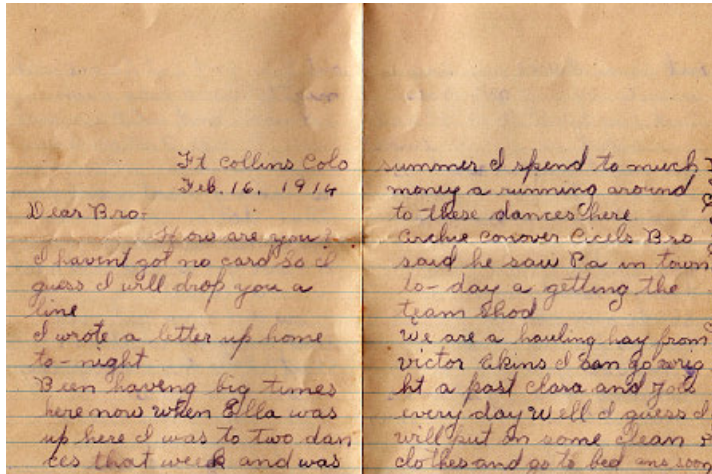
Looking north towards the homestead. Ray kept his prize Hampshire hogs in a shed at this site. Ray's niece, Renee Schnorr remembers visiting the Bear brothers when she was a child. Ray would ask her in his usual brisk tone, "Do you want to ride a pig?" Before she could answer Ray would pick her up under her arms and set her on one of the large sows; *courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton*



Above left photo as taken of Ray after the blizzard of 1949. Ray was attempting to cut a path for the livestock to get to a watering tank at the homestead. Photo at right is Ray with a team of horses during winter; *courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton*

Both brothers loved to attend dances and music was a large part of their lives. Bert was adept at the fiddle, while Ray played a mouth organ (harmonica). In the 1930s, they played jazz music on a phonograph at the homestead while the brothers practiced their dance steps. Niece Renee Schnorr remembers that Ray especially liked the World War I song “It’s a Long Way to Tipperary.”

An early homesteader, Berten Rohrbacher, interviewed in 2012, recalled being present at dances with the Bear brothers saying, “That Ray could dance up a storm! He would dance all night long!”



This letter dated February 16, 1916 from Ray to his brother Bert mentions that the past summer he “...spent too much money a running around to these dances here ...”.

From 1934 to 1940, the brothers helped with the excavation of the famous Lindenmeier archaeological dig by the Smithsonian Institution with their team of horses.



Ray is helping the Smithsonian Institution during an excavation near the North Lot with Jack and a prize team of horses. Ray was in his forties by this time and still tough as a nail; courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton

When the Bear home was purchased by the Roman family in 1960, Bert and Ray moved to 418 Olive Street in Fort Collins, where they lived with a niece (B. Martin 2006).

In the 1970s, they became residents of the Four Seasons nursing home where they continued to hone their dance steps even in advanced years (Martin 2009, 55).

Their descendants relate that they kept their lives simple and rarely spent money on themselves as they wanted to save all of their resources to help their family members in town. Niece Cathy Vlasak says, "As little as they had, they were proud of what they had." After moving to Fort Collins in his seventies and looking back on his life, Bert expressed that he only had one regret: he wished he would have gotten to see Yellowstone National Park.

By 1940, Dudley Bear had moved to Englewood, Colorado, with his wife Helen, where they had a son Herbert. Dudley worked in an iron manufacturing company. Hazel Bear was the first of the Bear clan to pass away. Unfortunately, Hazel took her own life just shy of her 20th birthday on January 6, 1916. Family members recall that Hazel left a note which mentioned "...you'll be sorry because I won't be able to work the potato fields anymore..." Below is a Fort Collins Courier newspaper article dated January 21, 1916 regarding Hazel's funeral.



At 418 Olive Street, the Warrior is on the left and the Poet on the right, ca. late 1960s; courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton

#### **WAVERLY.**

**January 13.—At present writing a very cold wave has been quite noticeable in this part of the country. The many friends of Mr. and Mrs. Geo. Bear extend to them their most heartfelt sympathy during their recent sorrow through the death of their daughter, Hazel.**

**A very large number of people from Waverly attended the funeral of Hazel Bear in Collins Sunday.**

*Fort Collins Courier 1916*

Lettie passed away on March 8, 1950, at the age of 80. George lived another seven years and died August 13, 1957, at age 94. Walter died August 3, 1973, at age 75. The oldest son, Bert, died on March 22, 1978 at the age of 88. Ray continued to live and dance at Four Seasons another twelve years after Bert died. Two years shy of his 100th birthday, Ray died on the 6th of January 1990. In 1988, Herbert Bruce died at age 81 and two years later, the oldest daughter, Clara Farrar, died at 94 years-old.



Evelyn Virginia's daughters, Cathy Vlasak and Renee Schnorr, who generously provided photos and historical references still live in the Fort Collins area.

Inez married George Fenton and the couple had two boys, Leo and Jack. Both brothers, who provided historical information and photos for the Bear story have passed away.

### **Sarah Howard/John Hacker 1913-1930s**



The Poet (above left) and The Warrior (above right) dancing with the same woman; *courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton*



These photos were taken at different events in the 1970s. The photo at left, from left to right is Inez, Bert, Clara, Walter, Ray and Dudley. The photo at right-from left to right is Bert, Walter, Clara, Dudley and Ray. *courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton*



Sarah Howard:

320 Acres Issue Date July 7, 1919 Original Homestead Act of 1862

157.1 Acres Issue Date June 14, 1927 Stock Raising Act of 1916

John Hacker:

320 Acres Issue Date August 20, 1918 Original Homestead Act of 1862

320 Acres Issue Date February 26, 1920 Original Homestead Act of 1862

Mother and son, Sarah Howard and John Hacker, homesteaded within the same time-frame and in close proximity to each other. Their sections were separated by only one section which had been owned by William Lindenmeier Jr. since 1911, four years before John Hacker's arrival at Soapstone.

The Howard/Hacker story typifies the classic Soapstone Prairie homesteader in several ways: they homesteaded just after the turn of the 20th Century, lived on the property part-time while maintaining a home in Fort Collins, were flanked between the large ranching operations to the north and the lush, green valley to the south, and created an income other than subsisting primarily off the land. Because of the challenges a homesteader experienced providing for themselves in the semi-arid landscape, for most it was necessary to find alternative resources to provide an income to survive.

Through several sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau and three oral history accounts, a story regarding the homestead and the individuals who spent time there has been developed as close to fact as possible. Those sources include: Cheyenne, Wyoming residents, Keith and Myrna Roman as well as two other individuals who were interviewed in 2012. Those two interviewees wish to remain anonymous and are referred to below as Anonymous Interview 1 (AI1) and Anonymous Interview 2 (AI2). Evidence of the Howard/Hacker existence on Soapstone Prairie consists of several sources, land patents, a physical homestead ruin, U.S. Census Records and oral history

Very little is known of the Howard/Hacker story. The extended family appeared to be close knit and always lived together or within close proximity. They took jobs as laborers, handymen, and worked for the Great Western Sugar Beet Company. There is also some evidence of additional land transactions in the area and a creative way to increase their income.

Sarah (Potter) Howard was born in Missouri in 1861. On January 14, 1877 at the age of 16, she married a 21-year-



Sarah Howard; courtesy Brian Carroll

old farmer, Ninevah Hacker, in Bethany, Missouri. The couple's first son, Charles, was born in September of 1878, followed by William in June of 1884, and John in October of 1889. Unfortunately, Sarah was widowed the year John was born when Ninevah was killed by a tornado in Kansas.

Sarah raised her sons as a single mother for seven years before marrying a relative of Ninevah, Frank Hacker. Sarah relocated her sons to Spring Wood County, Oklahoma where Sarah gave birth to two additional children, Sylvia (b. September 1892) and Ida (b. January 1896).

Sometime after the turn of the 20th century the couple separated and Sarah left for Colorado with four of her five children. There is no record of Ida Hacker after 1900 and she did not arrive in Colorado with her mother and siblings. Sarah met a widower living in Buckhorn, Larimer County named Joseph Howard. National Park Service records reflect that Joseph Howard was a private in the 9th Independent Battery of the Wisconsin Light Artillery during the Civil War. Joseph's wife Melissa died on March 2, 1910 and by December of that same year, he and Sarah were wed by Judge C.S. Potter in Fort Collins, Colorado. However, Sarah was widowed again on August 7, 1915, when Joseph died in a veterans' hospital.

In 1909, at the age of 18, daughter Sylvia Hacker married a 33-year-old handyman named John Compton and moved to Eaton, Colorado. Their first baby was born in December of that year, a son they named Guy. By 1910, the Compton family had moved to San Jose, California, where they had four more children and eventually retired there.

Prior to Joseph Howard's death, both Sarah and her son John filed claims in the Bristol Miner. John homesteaded in the area now known as Cedar Canyon, located south of the northwest section of the Canyon Trail. John filed his claim in 1913. A year before he officially proved up, he and wife, Mary, resided part time at 156 West 2nd Street in Loveland, Colorado. In 1914, Sarah also filed a claim on a section of property in the ponderosa pines one and half mile to the south of John's and began her own process of proving up.

Sarah Howard received two different patents from the government for her land: One in 1919 for 320 acres under the Homestead Act of 1862 and one in 1927 for 320 acres under the Stock Raising Act of 1916. She was required to show that the later acreage was unsuitable for cultivation (Carroll 2017).

In her documents filed in April, 1916, she notes "this land is mountainous grazing land and is too rough and rocky to be plowed and cultivated." Walking the land today, it is evident this was a true statement (Carroll 2017).

The Howard homestead was constructed of sandstone and grout among 500-year-old ponderosa pine trees. A sandstone quarry is located above the homestead. Evident from its complexity, the builder had experience in engineering a homestead which could withstand high winds and hailstorms. The homestead includes remnants of a double-roomed structure with a doorway facing east, a spring house, and a corral. It is the only homestead constructed of this material still partially intact at Soapstone Prairie.



Researchers at the Howard Homestead (not accessible to visitors); *courtesy Kenneth Jessen.*



Southeast corner Howard homestead (above left) and detail (above right); *courtesy Kenneth Jessen*

Remains of a possible root cellar, as well as historic artifacts such as broken glass, square nails, horse combs, and a barrel ring were found at the site. The few sections of tangled barbed wire and fence post still visible on the property are possible evidence of her attempt at stock-raising. (City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program, 2007:35).

Cheyenne, Wyoming resident, Keith Roman remembered his Aunt Paula (nee Welch) Roman, recalled riding her horse to visit a woman and a daughter who lived in the ponderosa pines. Paula Roman was raised in an arroyo just a mile northwest of the Howard homestead. She related to Keith that survival at the site was challenging as the women had to haul water from a spring every day. Another local homesteader remembers being aware of two women living in the pines in the 1930s when he was a very young boy. (AI1 2012) The fact that Sylvia was married and living in Eaton, Colorado would disqualify her to be one of the women living in the pines. The identities of both women are still relatively unknown (Roman 2012).

According to historian Brian Carroll, “Stories about moonshining, women residing in the stone house on the homestead, and others, ignore the fact that Sarah Howard is recorded as selling her property in 1927. Because of the proximity of the Hacker family, there are any number of possibilities of different women and girls living at the house either as residents or visitors. The properties assigned to Hacker Jr. and Sr. were both sold in 1928.”

When Fort Collins voted in Prohibition in June of 1896 this created financial opportunities for those in outlying communities to fill the niche for distilled spirits. As countless newspaper articles from Wellington and Fort Collins suggest, moonshining was big business. Soapstone Prairie was the perfect backdrop for a prospective bootlegger: it was isolated, provided a viewshed for a moonshiner to watch for traffic, and it was just a few miles from the Wyoming border.

The ponderosa pines were the location of a reported successful bootleg operation from approximately the late 1910s to the 1930s. The structure was dubbed the “Moonshine Shack.” The sour mash produced at the site was of such good quality that the traffic coming in and out of the pines could be seen for miles. (AI2 2012) Whether it was neighboring homesteaders upset at the relentless traffic to the pines or another bootlegger hoping to shut down their competition, the sheriff in Wellington was alerted to activities at the site and decided to take a deputy with him to investigate. The identities of the individuals running the moonshine business in the pines were not disclosed in the Fort Collins Courier newspaper article dated August 11, 1919 (right).

By 1920, John Hacker had proved up on both of his half sections and was living at 426 Pitkin Street in Fort Collins with his wife, Mary, and their three children, Elmer (b. 1925), Thelma (b. 1926) and Stella (b. 1920).

## MOONSHINERS' STILL FOUND IN DESERTED SHACK NEAR STATE LINE

The first illicit liquor still to be found in this county since national prohibition went into effect was located 25 miles north of here yesterday by Sheriff Cooke. It was suspicion that caused the sheriff to make the trip. He found copper worms, half a barrel of sour mash and other evidence showing a recent attempt to make whisky.

Damping the sour mash on the ground, the sheriff brot the worms to his office.

Investigations and inquiries revealed the fact that two men had been there a week ago and said they came there to plow. When one of the neighbors went to see them they would not let him in the house, claiming that they were working on a very expensive invention for autos and had gone there to secure absolute solitude.

*(Fort Collins Courier 1919)*



His mother, Sarah Howard, and older bachelor brother William Hacker lived next door at 414 Pitkin Street. John was employed with the Great Western Sugar Beet Company, while William was working as a laborer on a farm. With the certificate of ownership, Hacker now owned his section outright and did not need to separate his time between the homestead and his Pitkin Street address.

In 1927, the family moved to Berthoud, Colorado and all were living under one roof on Third Street. However, just three years later, John's wife, Mary, was not present in the home, leaving an additional daughter, Mae (b. 1922) for John to look after.

Both John and William worked as handymen in the Berthoud area after the 1930s. Sarah received an old age pension in 1933 (12Ma).

According to Carroll, "What is apparent is that the Sarah Howard story is unique. She remained close to the Potter and Hacker clans up to her death. She was married to two different Hackers (one, a civil war vet who was disabled and left her, even though she is listed as next of kin in his Veteran records) . The Howards and Hackers as a group were longtime users of the land and reflect on the nature of those willing to homestead at Soapstone."

Sarah died in Berthoud, Colorado, on February 17, 1936, at the age of 75 and is buried in Grandview Cemetery in Fort Collins along with many of the answers to this fascinating story.

### **James Henry "Shorty" Tallman 1914-1928**

16.38 Acres Issue Date September 22, 1919 Original Homestead Act of 1862

A half mile directly east and just over a bluff from the Nelson homestead is the James "Shorty" Tallman site. The Pronghorn Trail passes through Tallman's land before the first gate. Barbed wire, clapboard siding, and an old cook stove still litter the site. The Tallmans lived there for just over a decade.

Emigrating from the Midwest in approximately 1900, the Tallmans filed a claim and began homesteading in 1914. They were surrounded by bachelors. Recently divorced, Nelson Guy was living on a claim by himself across the draw to the west of the Tallmans; John Grimm was in the arroyo a half mile to the south; and the young coal miner, John Thompson, was three miles down the dirt road. Both James and Nelson were Iowa-born farmers.

James was born March 15, 1875 to Samuel and Sarah Tallman. He was the oldest of a family of ten children. In 1900, the family moved from Iowa to Colorado and settled in the Severance area. James found work as a farm laborer.

Five years after the move to Colorado, James began farming on land near Windsor, Colorado, where he met 21 year-old Jessie (last name unknown) and the two were married. Their first child, Kenneth, was born in 1907. Two years later, James sold all of his livestock and declared through the Fort Collins Courier newspaper, that he was leaving the state with his wife and son. James sold eleven horses, one cow, hogs, chickens, household goods, and all farm machinery to pay for the move.

The family moved to California Mesa near Montrose, Colorado, where they lived for a several years and James worked as a farm laborer. A nephew named Charles Scarlet lived with the couple. The young son, Kenneth, was not recorded as present with the Tallmans during their move back to northern Colorado in 1913. It is possible the boy died and that the Tallmans desired to be closer to family.

James and Jessie filed a claim on the southern bluffs of Soapstone Prairie in 1914 and began the process of proving up. James filed a Homestead Act of 1862 claim which would have required him to build a home and improve the land either through ranching or farming. The tangled barbed wire still on the property site is evidence he had livestock. The springs in Wire Draw furnished water for the cattle and horses. The granite stone, river rock, and clapboard used for a foundation and home are visible beneath the mahogany bushes that line the Pronghorn Trail. A daughter, Elsie, was born to the couple while living at the homestead in October of 1917.

A benefit to the isolation of living in the Bristol Miner Precinct was the natural quarantine against illness, such as the influenza epidemic in 1918. But the homesteaders were not completely immune to viral attacks. Elsie caught pneumonia at the homestead in 1919 and was transferred to a hospital in Severence. She survived and lived to adulthood.



James "Shorty" Tallman at left, possibly taken in Laramie, Wyoming, while James was working for the Union Pacific Railroad; *courtesy of ancestry.com*

In November of 1921, James leased a quarter section of his land for oil. Cactus Oil and Roxana Oil were the oil developers in the area at the time. But this wasn't enough to survive the harsh environment and imminent approaching depression. In 1928, the Tallmans were forced to abandon their homestead. As did many men at the time, James found work with the railroad, an industry that required a large workforce. According to local newspaper reports, James Tallman was a hardworking, likeable character and he did better than most during the challenging years of the Great Depression. James gained a position as station engineer with the Union Pacific Railroad in Laramie, Wyoming where he lived for many years with Jessie and Elsie.

### **Welch Family homestead 1917-1928**

320 Acres Issue Date February 25, 1922 Original Homestead Act of 1862

320 Acres Issue Date February 25, 1922 Stock Raising Act of 1916

Peter Welch was born in Germany, September 22, 1875, and immigrated to the United States in 1891, at the age of 16. During the Spanish American War he enlisted with the First U.S. Cavalry as a private in Company B and was stationed at Fort D A Russell in Cheyenne, Wyoming. He was discharged four years later.

In 1907, Peter married Almina Bonline who was born in Nebraska on March 16, 1883.



View of the Lindinmeier Ranch from the Welch homestead; *courtesy Suzy Riding*

The couple settled in the Boxelder Valley where their two children were born: Pauline (1909) and Warren (1913). The Boxelder Valley was located 28 miles north of Fort Collins which is south/ southwest of Soapstone Prairie. Its population of 25 residents primarily included ranchers and stockmen. Peter worked for the William Lindenmeier Ranch. In 1917 Peter moved his family northeast over the bluff toward Soapstone Prairie and filed a claim in the verdant arroyo on the western section of the landscape. His homestead overlooked the Lindenmeier Ranch valley where thousands of head of cattle grazed.

Peter used the narrow contour of the arroyo as a natural corral for his livestock. Barbed wire fencing was strung on the hillsides and the opening to the arroyo led the sheep and cattle in. A spring at the lower east end provided water. The homestead was built on the summit of the gulch just above the livestock pens and can be seen from Cheyenne Rim Trail. It was constructed of various timbers set against a dugout along a hillside. While primitive compared to other homestead structures at Soapstone Prairie, it was built to withstand the gale-force gusts that are standard on the Cheyenne Ridge. At almost one hundred years old, it has stood the test of time. The only grove of aspen on Soapstone Prairie is located on the hillside of the hollow adjacent to the homestead.

“The Welch homestead was constructed of timbers and built partially into a hillside above a spring-fed tributary of Rawhide Creek. The remains of two other structures, a livestock pen and a possible chicken coop, are located just to the south of the homestead.” (LaBelle and Andrews, 2007: 107-108) (Martin 2009, 56-57).



Welch homestead as it would have looked in 1917 (left) and the homestead today (right); courtesy Kenneth Jessen

Cheyenne, Wyoming resident Keith Roman provided this description of the homestead:

*This is one of the old homesteads, .. and they built in the bank, like this, and they just put a roof over the top of ‘em, and most of the homesteaders lived in these type of, uh, dugouts, and there was quite a few of these around the country and people actually just kinda survived here. And they lived off of the fat of the land ... you ate a lot of venison and rabbits and they would bring in their staple goods like flour, and sugar, and coffee, and beans, and things that would keep throughout the winter when they stayed here ... they were relatives to us. My aunt’s folks lived here. Paula was her name. And you can see there isn’t too much of it left, but this is where they survived” (Martin 2009, 57).*

Peter Welch registered for the draft in Wellington, Colorado in September 1917. His draft card described him as tall, medium build, with blue eyes and brown hair. Peter was 42 years old at the time and did not serve in the war.





Historian Brian Carroll at Welch homestead (left) ; *courtesy Suzy Riding*, author Suzy Riding at Welch homestead (right); *courtesy Ken Jessen*

For the next ten years, the Welchs continued to live a quiet life, raising Paula and Warren while Peter worked the range as a ranch hand. The rocky hillside where the homestead was located was not conducive to extensive gardening or crop farming. The Welchs proved up by livestock pursuits.

In February 1922, the Welchs received a certificate of ownership for 640 acres. They were also anticipating the birth of their third child. A month before the baby was due, Almina went into premature labor. Miles from adequate healthcare, the child died at the homestead. Two days following the death of the baby, Peter placed the body in a wagon and took him to Fort Collins for burial on December 3, 1922.

The Welch baby is one of only two infants known to have died on Soapstone Prairie. An unidentified infant is believed to be buried in a shallow grave near the Guy homestead. However, that infant has not been identified as being a Guy baby and its identity remains unknown. Possibly it is the infant of a pioneer who passed away while the family was traveling through the valley (City of Fort Collins GIS Maps n.d.) (Kniebes 2008) (Sandmann 2012).

Paula and Warren attended Soapstone Springs School, located approximately two miles to the northeast. They also spent their days exploring the hillsides with the other homesteading children. Paula and Warren learned ranching from their father and the many cowpunchers that worked the landscape.



Photo at left, from left to right: Evelyn Bear, Dudley Bear, Paula Welch, Warren Welch exploring their backyard at Soapstone Prairie. Right, from left to right: Evelyn Bear, Dudley Bear, Paula Welch, Warren Welch at Soapstone Prairie Springs School; *courtesy of Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton*)



Warren Welch at 16 years old; *courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton*

Like so many Soapstone Prairie homesteaders, the Depression forced the family to move in search of work. Local resident, Berten Rohrbacher, who was raised south of Soapstone, describes the devastation the economic depression created on this prairie, “When the depression hit folks left their homes and would just walk. You could see them walking down the roads, looking for food, for work, for anything. My mother would get some food together and load us kids up in the car and we would take the food to a family near here. To see that family would bring tears to your eyes. The kids were dressed in rags. They had nothing. Do you understand? They had nothing!” (Rohrbacher 2012).

In 1927, the Welchs left the homestead and resided at 305 North Howes Street in Fort Collins for three years while Peter found work as a laborer. Today that site is a parking lot northwest of the City office buildings. In 1930, they moved to Virginia Dale, Colorado, and ten years later they were recorded as living in Carr, Colorado and living with their oldest daughter, Paula.

The two Welch children followed in their father's footsteps. Son Warren began employment with the Warren Livestock Company when he was only 16 years-old, the same age his father had set out on his own. Warren moved out of the homestead at Soapstone Prairie and into a bunkhouse with the other ranch hands in Laramie, Wyoming. Paula also worked for the Warrens where she met and married another local homesteader, Ben Roman. The couple had one child together before Ben was struck and killed by lightning just east of Soapstone Prairie near Carr on July 12, 1945. Paula's father died just four days later. This resilient and independent woman never remarried after Ben's death and is regarded as one of the best ranch hands the Warren Livestock Company ever produced.

Peter Welch died in Greeley July 16, 1945, at age 69. Almina buried him at Grandview Cemetery in Fort Collins. She lived another sixteen years and died on Christmas day in Colorado Springs, 1961. Son Warren buried his mother next to her husband and unnamed infant.

After Ben Roman's death, Paula retired to Cheyenne, Wyoming, where she lived into the 1960s. Although we know that Warren was present in the area in 1961 when he interred his mother at Grandview Cemetery in Fort Collins, his whereabouts after that are unknown. He was 37 years old at that time. Neither Paula or Warren are buried in Cheyenne, Fort Collins, or Greeley.

## **Rustic Women**

*"In their way pioneer women were the molders and shapers of western society; mothers, wives, business owners, schoolmarms, slowly but surely exerting their influence on the cities, town, and communities in which they lived."*

--Utah pioneer and suffragette, Emmeline B. Wells, 1897

Between 1906 and 1930 there were approximately 30 female homesteaders (women, their daughters and/or extended family) who lived at Soapstone Prairie fulltime. Excluding seasonal ranch hands, there were more females there than males.

Homesteaders were attracted to this area by two primary reasons; available land and income opportunities. In 1901 a homesteader could easily purchase an acre of land in and around the Fort Collins and Wellington, Colorado area for \$75.00 an acre. However, due to the agricultural boom of beets, wheat, and alfalfa, land prices soared, and by 1906 one acre of land cost at least \$225.00. This was a heavy price for homesteaders who had just spent their life savings crossing the plains with their families. The Bristol Miner area, today known as Soapstone Prairie, contained some of the last available homesteading land in northern Colorado. For an \$18.00 filing fee, and a lot of hard work, a homesteader could settle 160, 320 or 640 acres.

The area around Soapstone Prairie also offered income opportunities. Three large ranching outfits employed many of the homesteaders. In addition, the land on today's Meadow Springs Ranch had some of the best coal resources in Colorado. Bulger City, Indian Springs, Tenney, and Fort Collins mining companies paid \$1.50 a day for back breaking work and many of the homesteaders labored there.

The rustic women of Soapstone had to be resourceful to cope with the elements and the harsh conditions of this prairie, while living in a place where there were no amenities (and still aren't!). Opportunity brought them here, courage kept them here, and ingenuity helped them survive. Of the women homesteaders, four were immigrants of Irish, English, German, or Italian descent. Nine were born at Soapstone Prairie, two lost their lives there, one was widowed, and at least 2 single mothers. They not only kept the home with its endless chores, they also worked as laundrywomen, ranchers, teachers, housekeepers, laborers, and possibly even moonshiners.

### **Martha Thompson—Queen of the Prairie**

Martha is described by her descendants as the epitome of the pioneer woman. At six feet tall and big boned, she was a physically strong and formidable figure. The hardships of the prairie hadn't necessarily hardened her but had honed her instincts. According to her family she was the "no-nonsense" type and "called a spade a spade." Upon meeting Martha for the first time she had the intimidating custom of sizing a visitor up with her dark eyes, deciding whether she liked the newcomer or not. Martha lived at Soapstone Prairie from 1908 to 1928 with a five-year separation between 1912 and 1917.

Eighteen-year-old, single mother, Mary Jane Collins gave birth to Martha on April 4, 1876, in Decatur County, Iowa. Brother William followed two years later. Having no education, Mary Jane could not read or write and supported her children working as a domestic<sup>7</sup>. Martha attended school only to the third grade, when at the age of 8 she stayed home to care for her younger brother. When Martha was eight years-old her mother married a local farmer named William Kirkpatrick and the family set up house in Long Creek, Iowa.

On September 15, 1891, at the age of 15, Martha married a 21-year-old local farmer named Nelson Adell Guy in Leslie, Iowa. Martha's marriage at a young age was unusual even in the mid nineteenth century, as the average age of marriage for women during this time was between 22 and 26 years-old. With a limited education, she may have felt it was her only option. Like many teenagers, Martha may have been determined to do things differently than her own mother. However, Martha was in fact following in her mother's footsteps.

<sup>7</sup> A "domestic" was a housekeeper or housecleaner.



When Martha's youngest daughter, Ellen came to her with news of her own pregnancy out of wedlock at 16 years old, Martha cast no stones, but raised the baby boy so Ellen could have a chance at a life Martha may have dreamt of for herself as a teen.

Martha and Nelson's first child, Allie Eva, was born eight months after the marriage on May 4, 1892. Unfortunately, Allie died just three months shy of her second birthday on February 23, 1894<sup>8</sup>. Martha was already a month into her second pregnancy and on October 3, 1894, a son, Benjamin Franklin, was born. Benjamin lived only two weeks beyond his second birthday.

Following Benjamin's death, the couple began their immigration westward and moved 266 miles directly west of Long Creek to Phillips, Nebraska<sup>9</sup>. On August 18, 1897, Fauvette Ella "Betty" Guy was born. Two years later, fate dealt Martha and Nelson another blow when a son born July 4, 1900, christened Walter Melvin, survived only three months. He was buried in Phillips Cemetery, Hamilton County, Nebraska.

By 1900, the Guys were living in Fort Collins, Colorado, where the couple's third son, William Edward was born on September 11, 1901. They did not have family in Fort Collins, but with a farming background, Nelson was attracted to the area by the much-publicized agricultural boom in northern Colorado. The Guys settled into a small cottage at 622 Smith Street in Fort Collins<sup>10</sup>. Martha took care of the home and Nelson worked in construction and ditch digging. While living on Smith Street, Martha gave birth to the couple's sixth child, Charles Raymond. Charles died at the home just shy of his first birthday on August 29, 1905, of unknown causes. Charles was buried next to older brother, Walter Melvin in Hamilton County, Nebraska.

Martha purchased a home at 700 Colorado Street in Fort Collins solely with her own resources. Martha was adamant that her extended family, which included her brother William and his wife and children, live with them. Nelson and Martha's last child together, Mary Belle, was born June 28, 1907. Nelson co-owned a moderately successful sewer trench business, but he began looking north toward the chalk-colored bluffs where he'd learned a family could still get 160 acres for free. Nelson's decision to file a claim sealed his fate and his relationship with Martha.

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<sup>8</sup> Martha's descendants speculated that a possible reason for Allie Eva's death was Martha's young age and inexperience at motherhood. She may not have recognized signs of serious illness or known how to treat an illness. Allie's cause of death is unknown.

<sup>9</sup> Phillips, Nebraska is located in Hamilton County in the east central region of the state. Today the trip is a direct route along I-80.

<sup>10</sup> 622 Smith Street, Fort Collins does not currently exist.

Nelson selected a site under a domed hill west of Wire Draw<sup>11</sup>. He welcomed the solitude and isolation of the Bristol Miner Precinct. Their only neighbors were two bachelors: a ranch hand for the Warren Livestock Company named John Grimm, and a coal miner from Louisville, Colorado named John “Jack” Thompson.<sup>12</sup>

Nelson and Martha raised Betty, Ed, and Mary Belle at the homestead part time from 1908 to 1912, moving back and forth between the house on Colorado Street in Fort Collins and the Bristol Miner homestead. Martha kept busy raising the children and transporting them to and from school in her buckboard wagon.<sup>13</sup> Household chores at the homestead were harder than in town without the modern conveniences such as the “electric suction sweeper” (vacuum), and electric iron and toaster.<sup>14</sup> She tended to the livestock and garden, mended fences, hauled water, and canned vegetables and the rattles from the western prairie rattlesnakes which would occasionally seek shelter beneath the river rock foundation of the homestead.<sup>15</sup> Martha also worked as a laundry woman to make ends meet.

Whether it was the isolation, economic hardship, or other factors that caused a rift in the relationship is unknown, but the couple separated in December 1912. Nelson filed for divorce.<sup>16</sup> Nelson hired Claude Coffin one of the best young attorneys in Fort Collins. Coffin was an ardent arrowhead hunter and spent many hours with his brother, Major Roy Coffin, canvassing the Bristol Miner for ancient artifacts. Nelson may have met Coffin while he and his brother were searching for evidence of the Folsom

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<sup>11</sup> Today this site is directly north of the entrance gate station at Soapstone Prairie. Remnants of the Guy homestead can be seen from the road as it winds up the first hill.

<sup>12</sup> The John Grimm homestead was located in Wire Draw south east of the entrance gate station. The John Thompson homestead was located approximately a mile and a half to the south east near Round Butte.

<sup>13</sup> Historic photographic evidence indicates Ed Guy attended Soapstone Springs School three miles to the north of the homestead. Fort Collins school records show Fauvette “Betty” Guy attended school in town, while Mary Belle attended Buckeye School once she came of school age.

<sup>14</sup> Soapstone Prairie has never enjoyed the luxury of electricity, therefore these household appliances introduced between 1903 and 1909 would not have been available or utilized at the homestead.

<sup>15</sup> Martha’s descendants can recall many jars of canned rattlers from the snakes she killed at Soapstone. Homesteading midwives believed that drinking powdered rattles from a snake would ease childbirth. With Martha’s experience giving birth to seven children, she may have worked as a midwife. Homesteaders would also tan the hides, cook the meat and use the rattlers as baby toys.

<sup>16</sup> Nelson publicly accused Martha of adultery, however according to Nelson and Martha’s divorce decree, the judge granted the divorce due to cruelty on Nelson’s part.

culture near his land. Nelson asked for custody of the children but even Coffin was no match for Martha and he lost the case. Martha moved the children semi-permanently to 700 Colorado Street, while Nelson proved up alone at the homestead in the summer of 1913. This wasn't the end of life in the Bristol Miner for Martha however.

In accordance with the Homestead Act of 1862, a married woman was not allowed to file a homestead claim in her own name unless she was considered the head of household (Wishart n.d.). Her divorce from Nelson left her with, literally a vast prairie of opportunity, and in 1914 Martha filed a claim for just over 145 acres near Round Butte, adjacent to the homestead site of the bachelor coal miner, John Thompson. The two had gotten acquainted on her many travels in her buckboard wagon past Thompson's homestead and the friendship eventually blossomed into romance.

In the tightknit Bristol Miner community, it didn't take long for the news of Martha and John's friendship to reach Nelson. In 1917, broken and heavyhearted at the realization that a reunion with Martha was not ever going to happen, Nelson purchased a one-way ticket at the Cheyenne Union Pacific Railroad depot and headed for Nebraska where he had secured employment. He would never be seen alive by his family again.

Martha and John were married on July 2nd, 1917. Because Martha was eight years older than John, divorced, and had children, John's protective Scottish mother, Maggie, did not approve of the union. But, the two homesteaders were determined to make it work and Martha moved the children back to the Bristol Miner and into John's homestead.

John and Martha's first child, Martha M. Thompson, was born in June 1919. The birth of their second daughter, Margie, followed five years later in 1924. Then at the age of 50, in 1928, Martha gave birth to twins Helen and Ellen. These were the last of her eleven children. All four girls born at the Thompson homestead survived to adulthood.

On July 1st, 1924, Mary Belle Guy received a telegram informing her of her father's death.

The telegram read:

*Franklin, Kentucky 1152 PM 7/1/24*

*Mary Guy RR NO 1*

*Wellington, Colo*

*Your father died this eve at six PM advise as to burial his funds are not sufficient*

*House and Bryan, Undertakers-----11:35 PM*

On July 3rd, Ed Guy arrived at the Louisville and Nashville railway depot in Franklin, Kentucky and retrieved his father's body at the undertaker's office, which doubled as a furniture store on east Cedar Street. Ed had brought with him the funds necessary for

Nelson's funeral preparations:

Casket box, hearse and driver in shipment of remains to Phillips, Neb.	\$100.00
Embalming and shaving	\$20.00
Burial Suit	\$22.50
Telegram from Nashville	\$1.55
Telegram from Franklin	\$2.34
Night Letter	\$0.79
Telegram to Birmingham	\$2.40
Total	\$149.58

The chorus of cicadas in the cottonwoods above Phillips Cemetery hung in the humidity of the sweltering July heat while Ed buried Nelson next to sons, Walter Melvin and Charles Raymond in Phillips Cemetery. It is unknown if anyone other than Ed was present for Nelson's internment.

By the mid-1920s, the agriculture and mining industries developed automation and mechanization and laborers were no longer needed. Unemployment and poverty spread in the Bristol Miner. The Thompsons were forced to liquidate and move. In 1928, Model A, Maxwell and Nash automobiles as well as horse and wagons circled their homestead and their belongings were auctioned off. Everything was sold, from a shovel for 35 cents to a team of prize mules for \$202.50. The Thompsons returned to the home on Colorado Street where they lived out the remainder of their lives.

John died at age 69 in 1954 and was buried in Roselawn Cemetery in Fort Collins. Martha lived another seventeen years. On her deathbed, just a few months shy of her 95th birthday, eighty years after her marriage as a child bride to Nelson, after two decades on the prairie, giving birth to eleven children and burying four, Martha told her family, "I'm tired, I'm ready to go home." She passed away on December 17, 1970 and was buried next to John at Roselawn Cemetery. Martha left six living daughters, thirteen children and nineteen great grandchildren. Homesteaders needed five attributes to survive: courage, optimism, resourcefulness, commitment, and purpose. Martha embodied all these.

The remote location of the prairie and the strong northwest winds that could tear the hinges off a homestead door within hours of its construction, or topple the foundation all-together, made the residents of the Bristol Miner perpetually vulnerable. For decades the landscape was a haven for moonshiners traveling the Lincoln Highway, also known as the "Rum Runner" or "Bootleg" Highway which paralleled the heart of the community. Although several of the Bristol Miner homesteaders supplemented their incomes with homemade stills, moonshining and bootlegging had the capacity to



attract a criminal element. To shield her daughters from the bootleg traffic and ranch hands who traversed her property, Martha was known to dress her daughters in denim overalls rather than dresses and keep their hair short in an effort to hide their sexual identity and vulnerability.

In contrast to her customary coarse demeanor, Martha was also known for her thoughtfulness and generosity. Newspaper accounts and photographs taken at the homestead paint a mosaic of the warmth, unity, and safety she created in the Bristol Miner community through many celebrations she hosted at the homestead. Her charity extended to her ex-husband as well. The cause of Nelson's unfortunate and early demise in Kentucky is unknown. House and Bryan Funeral Directors operated under that name until 1927 when the business went through a renovation. "Tuck" Bryan passed away and the business closed for good in 1958. If a death certificate was issued for Nelson it was never found (Shoulders 2018).

What drew Nelson to the south-central hamlet of Franklin, Kentucky, on the cusp of the Tennessee border in the 1920s is also a mystery. According to Nelson's descendants, he was a man "always looking for the next deal" (Sandmann 2012). As a farmer, Nelson may have been attracted to the tobacco industry, which supported Kentucky for centuries as one of its top agricultural imports. A teamster by trade, Nelson possibly subcontracted his team and wagon to transport supplies to the railroad or other industries. Only speculative evidence may suggest that Nelson was drawn by the bootleg business which propagated the manufacture of distilled spirits in the "hollers" that made southern Kentucky famous during this timeframe. Nevertheless, Nelson's death occurred the weekend Martha and John had planned to celebrate their seventh wedding anniversary. In lieu of a gift for John, Martha gave Ed the funds he needed to retrieve Nelson's body and burial next to two of his sons.

Nineteenth century women were defined not necessarily by their intelligence, ability to produce an income, or business savvy, but as their role as a wife and mother. Remarkably, Martha balanced all of these. Through determination, strength of spirit, and a sense of purpose she transformed her life from a young farm girl with a third-grade education to a successful landowner, business woman, entrepreneur, single mother, wife, widow, prairie nurse, farmer, host, mule tamer, and rattlesnake wrangler. She began her life with a sense of desperation and survival and closed it with abundance and security.

Martha never owned a driver's license and all her traveling, to work as a domestic, to visit the bank in Wellington, or to bring the children to Fort Collins and back, was done by buckboard wagon. Some visitors to Soapstone Prairie say if you listen closely on quiet days you may still hear the clatter of the stay chains against the sideboard and the rhythmic sound of mule hooves on the prairie floor as Martha slowly makes her way up Wire Draw.

## Paula Welch—Kid Cowgirl!

*“Cowgirl is an attitude. Cowgirl is a pioneer spirit, a special American brand of courage. The cowgirl faces life head on, lives by her own lights, and makes no excuses. Cowgirls take stands. They speak up. They defend the things they hold dear.”*

-Dale Evans, American actress, singer, and songwriter

From the 1860s to today, the rolling hills of Soapstone Prairie have provided nutrient rich grasses that fattened and sustained ranchers' sheep and cattle. Two of these large ranching outfits were the Lindenmeier Ranch (LR) and the Warren Livestock Company (WLSC). Between 1888 and 1941, the Lindenmeier Ranch was located in a basin between Cedar Canyon in the northwest section of Soapstone and the ponderosa grove to the south. Built from humble beginnings near Horse Creek, Wyoming in the 1870s, the Warren Livestock Company expanded into northern Colorado and by the early 1900s occupied approximately 65%, or 48 sections of the land we now call Soapstone Prairie. Dubbed the “vast empire” due to its mammoth proportions and legendary reputation, the Warrens hired upwards of two hundred employees each season. The Warren Livestock Company owned approximately 40,000 head of sheep and cattle and 2,000 horses. Many of those employed by ranches were Soapstone Prairie homesteaders.

Atop a bluff on the western rim of Soapstone Prairie, the skeletal remains of a dugout lie in a coffin of rabbit brush and mahogany. Below it to the south, in an arroyo lined by cottonwoods and ash, sits the foundation of a barn, and beside it, barely visible, a chicken coop is matted to the prairie floor, entangled in sage and buffalograss. The German hymns that once bellowed “...Ach lieben Christen seid getrost”<sup>17</sup> from its interior on Sunday mornings have been replaced with the occasional trill of a western meadowlark sitting atop the fallen doorway and wind gusts that whistle and churn over the Cheyenne Ridge rattling the deteriorating timber laths. Today it sits weathered and forsaken, graying in the wind and sun, but a century ago this was the childhood home of one of the best cowhands the Warren Livestock Company ever produced.

A native of Germany, Peter Welch was born in Zweibrucken near the Schwarzbach River on September 22, 1875. At the age of fifteen Peter immigrated to the United States where he eventually joined the First Colorado Cavalry in July, 1900 at Fort D. A. Russell in Cheyenne, Wyoming. Discharged in 1901, Peter continued to live in the northern Colorado area working for local ranchers. In 1907, Peter married Nebraska native, Almina Bonline and the couple made their home in north Fort Collins. Their only daughter Pauline “Paula” was born in the spring of 1910. The family moved to the current location of Red Mountain Open Space, where son Warren was born. Peter continued to work for ranching outfits and secured a job with the Lindenmeier Ranch

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<sup>17</sup> Popular German hymn written by Johanne Gigas in 1561, translated means “Ah Dear Christians be Comforted.”

(LR). In 1914, while Warren was still an infant, Peter relocated his family to the Bristol Miner to be closer to the LR. He filed a claim on a bluff overlooking the Lindenmeier pastureland and began the process of proving up.

Paula and Warren lived in the Bristol Miner full time. On weekdays they attended Soapstone Springs School with the other homesteading children. Wind, rain, snow, or shine they rode their ponies close together the mile and half east to the school, carefully crisscrossing arroyos and galloping up mountain mahogany-dotted bluffs. On blustery snowy days they buried their faces in the ponies' manes to keep the biting wind off their cheeks, and rubbed their fingers through the thick furry winter coats to keep their hands warm. Impromptu pony races up sandy Rawhide Wash would get them a scolding from Peter as the ponies were well-trained cattle horses and an injury to one would be devastating. Warm summer days were spent traversing the hillsides exploring abandoned structures, cliffs, and caverns with other homesteading children. Inspecting the many tipi rings near the homestead, the children found arrowheads, points, and tools, that were hundreds and even thousands of years old, and cached them in their saddle bags for safekeeping. But Paula and Warren's favorite thing to do was to help their father with ranch work.

Ranching families started their day before sunrise. If they hadn't rounded up their work horses and had them saddled by the time the sun peeked over the hillside they were already "losing daylight." Secured to a tie post near the homestead, the horses enjoyed a breakfast of oats and alfalfa cubes. For Peter and the children, breakfast was also usually oatmeal or "mush" as Peter called it, with butter and a touch of syrup if they had it. Mush provided the fuel needed to get through a busy morning until Almina would meet them with egg sandwiches for lunch.

A day with Peter Welch meant working from sunup to sundown in the saddle. Paula and Warren sat proud on their ponies next to Peter as he and the other ranch hands talked small talk and discussed the agenda for the day in a semi-circle on their mounts. With their colorful bandanas, fancy jingle spurs and "Wasey cowboy hats"<sup>18</sup> tilted to one side of their weathered foreheads, Paula and Warren were captivated with the ranch hands and the romance of the cowboy life.

Workdays for cowboys could last up to 15 hours in all environmental or weather conditions and much of that time was spent on a horse or doing other physical labor. Daily chores of a ranch hand included:

- Herding sheep or cattle from one pasture to another.
- Tending to sick or injured animals.
- Digging irrigation ditches and/or dams to get water to sheep and cattle.

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<sup>18</sup> A Wasey (pronounced way-see) hat was a sagebrush crowned cowboy hat popular in the first two decades of the 20th century.

- Mending wind pumps.
- Riding the fence line and mending any unsecured fences.
- Cleaning and painting the bunkhouse.
- Tending to the horses such as hoof care and tack repair.

Each summer the Welches travelled to Cheyenne, Wyoming, to watch their fellow cowhands compete in the annual rodeo. By the 1920s when Paula was in her impressionable early teens, women's rodeo was enormously popular and these courageous and daring women were the heroines of the day.

Born out of survival skills needed to succeed on the prairie, women cowhands often helped their fathers, brothers, sons, and husbands with the ranch work and by the early 1900s women were competing alongside the men at the rodeos. They were the first female professional athletes. Early rodeos from Pendleton, Oregon to Cheyenne, Wyoming and Madison Square Garden featured all types of women performers such as sharpshooters, trick riders, racers, bulldoggers, bronc riders, and ropers. They performed before record crowds as well as presidents, kings, queens and dignitaries. (Wursta 2011).

Paula was enamored with the professional cowgirls she saw in Cheyenne such as famed bronc rider Prairie Rose Henderson. With her trademark self-styled "Turkish Trousers," Henderson won the first Cheyenne Frontier Days race for women in August 23, 1899 (Branigan n.d.). The "First Lady of Rodeo" Mabel Strickland, also inspired young Paula. Dubbed the most photographed cowgirl of all time, Strickland was the first woman to grace the cover of the Cheyenne Frontier Days program when she appeared as a bronc rider at the event in 1924. Strickland went on to become a Hollywood stunt woman and celebrity influencing many young aspiring cowgirls (Olson n.d.). Bertha Kaepernik Blancett was described as "the most daring, gamest, and as sportsmanlike a woman as ever rode at a round-up, and as efficient as any cowboy on the range" and was a world champion bronc rider. She captivated Paula during the relay races in Cheyenne (Holdener 2017).

These women of the golden era of rodeo left a legacy steeped in American lore and the imagination of little girls needing heroes and longing for the life of a cowgirl. But, Paula wasn't just dreaming about being a cowgirl, she was living it! Both Paula and Warren went to work for the Warren Livestock Company in their teens.

The WLSC hired more than two hundred employees each season. They didn't discriminate, but they wouldn't think twice about firing a cowhand they couldn't do the job. Paula was no exception and worked twice as hard to prove herself. Emulating her cowgirl heroines, Paula worked fearlessly alongside her male counterparts, wrestling and branding steers, roping calves, and driving the herd.



Paula eventually married one of her fellow cowhands, Ben Roman. Ben was raised in the Bristol Miner near Round Butte, several miles southeast of Paula's childhood homestead. Unfortunately, in the summer of 1945 Paula would lose both of the most important men her life. Ben was killed by lightning on July 12th while working cattle. Her father Peter Welch died just four days later on the 16th. Paula never remarried and worked for the Warren Livestock Company most of her adult life. She is regarded as one of the best cowhands the Warrens ever had (Roman 2012).

### **Mary Phillips—School Spirit**

In the quietness of this vast prairie, it's hard to imagine that a hundred years ago laughter from school children at play could be heard while a schoolmarm called them in for another day of spelling, arithmetic, and social studies. From approximately 1908 to 1926, in the valley hidden below a bluff in the central section of Soapstone Prairie, a country schoolhouse served the homesteading children.

Teachers often arrived to take up their teaching duties unaccompanied and unfamiliar with the challenges of living on the frontier. Teachers came from as far away as New York and Illinois in their mission to educate the homesteading children in the wilds of the West. An 1890 census targeting schoolteachers, indicated that 11% of female teachers in the U.S. chose the life of a rural schoolteacher (Enss 2008, xiii). However, rattlesnakes and amorous cowboys were the least of her worries. Her mission was to lasso the attention span of a pioneer student body.

The schoolteacher provided attention, direction, and encouragement and the students depended on her for not only their educational needs, but for social etiquette as well, for she had entered their rural world from a place unlike their own, introducing them to a world of possibilities.

Schoolteachers in the rural setting were usually first term teachers, barely out of school and hardly out of their teens (Enss 2008, xiii). A young teacher at Soapstone made \$53 dollars a month, compared to \$77 a month for teachers in Fort Collins. Although an 1870s study of rural schoolteachers indicated that pupils under a female teacher showed more progress, their male counterparts, the schoolmasters, made more money than the schoolmarms.

According to a study at the time, 46% of schoolteachers desired a good salary, 46% considered teaching a stepping stone to better opportunities, and only 4% had a genuine interest in books and study.

The frontier curriculum included the usual reading, spelling, writing, and language arts, but sometimes other practical skills such as irrigation, mining, stock raising, and railroads. The students also learned about geography, history, government, and climate.

Oftentimes, a rural schoolteacher in charge of boisterous students, got homesick in the isolated conditions. Turnover was frequent, not because of dissatisfaction with the job, but because of marriage.

The Warren Livestock Company along with other large ranching organizations in the area, were in full operation while Soapstone School was open. There were many young and robust ranch hands available in the immediate area to catch the eye of a pretty young schoolteacher.

According to a Livermore homesteader, “Young ranchers and cowboys would wait for the bus to arrive at The Forks<sup>19</sup> with the newest schoolteacher. But, unbeknownst to her (the new teacher) one of those cowboys already had dibs on her. The other cowboys would have to wait their place in line until she was married off and another schoolteacher was needed.”

Mary Francis (nee Phillips) Webster was the last teacher at Soapstone Springs School. Mary was born in 1906 in the gold mining town of Idaho Springs, Colorado. She was the only child of Francis and Ella Phillips. Ella worked as a music teacher, while Francis supported the family as a gold miner. Upon obtaining an education, Mary accepted the position of schoolteacher at the Soapstone Springs School. Her classroom consisted of just a handful of local homesteading children. The school did not contain a teacherage<sup>20</sup>, and Mary stayed with the Bear family, traveling each morning one mile west to the school along with the children. By 1926, with only one student of school age, Evelyn Bear, Mary continued to tutor her final student at the homestead. It was while staying with the Bears that she met her future husband, an older cousin of Evelyn Bear, and her teaching days came to an end. On New Year’s Day in 1929, Mary married Ruben Elzie Webster and the couple settled in Fort Collins. However, Mary stayed close to her former students especially now that they were family (R. S. Cathy Vlasak 2012).

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<sup>19</sup> “The Forks” was a central location on the Overland Stage route and wagon road near present day Livermore, Colorado. Today it is located at the junction of Highway 287 and West County Road 74E.

<sup>20</sup> A “teacherage” was a building that served as a combination school and living quarters for the teacher in remote areas.

# *The Soapstone Springs School*

In the quietness of this vast prairie, it's hard to imagine that a hundred years ago laughter from schoolchildren at play could be heard while a schoolteacher called them in for another day of spelling, arithmetic, and social studies. In a valley hidden below a bluff in the center of Soapstone Prairie there was a country schoolhouse in operation from approximately 1908 to 1926 for the children of homesteaders.

The children of the dozen or more families that lived in School District 55 of the Bristol Miner Precinct at Soapstone Prairie and possibly a handful of children of the Warren Livestock ranch hands, attended this school.

## **Construction of the Soapstone Springs School**

In a flat area one half mile southeast of the Lindenmeier Archaeological Site (LAS) the remnants of the 20' X 20' foundation of the Soapstone Springs School still remains. The foundation was constructed of a primitive aggregate mixed with cement. The aggregate was comprised of coarse river rock and other stones found in the area. According to historian and author Ken Jessen, who visited the site in August, 2012, the initial construction of the school (approximately 1908) would have pre-dated commercial cement availability in the area; therefore bags of cement would have been hauled in by horse and wagon. The cement was mixed with the aggregate to form the foundation including a basement. The foundation could have been formed in one working day with a two- to three-man crew.



Southwest corner of Soapstone Springs School foundation. Construction of the foundation would have started here and proceeded counter clockwise; *courtesy of Ken Jessen*



Closer look at the southwest corner of the Soapstone Springs School foundation; *courtesy of Ken Jessen.*

The visible progression of the construction is interesting: the southwest corner of the foundation is made up of a good balance of cement and aggregate; the northwest corner appears to be mostly river rock and other rubble indicating that the crew started with the cement and aggregate mixture at the southwest corner and worked their way around to the northwest corner. As they began to run low on bagged cement, the builders used the natural resources available such as eroded granite and other rocks to complete the construction (Ken Jessen 2014).

As evidenced from historic photographs of the school, the exterior was constructed of fine lumber. The 2' X 6' clapboard siding runs horizontally across the structure. Jessen believes the siding is mill-lumbered lodgepole pine and is of good quality (Ken Jessen 2014). At the time, two lumber companies were in operation in Wellington, Colorado: Forest Lumber and Gilcrest Lumber. The clapboard could have been obtained from one of these and hauled in by horse and wagon. Note the detailed trim on the windows.

Thirty feet to the southeast of the school foundation, buried beneath tangled barbed wire and overgrown skunkbush (*Rhus trilobata*), is a well or cistern that was used by the school for drinking and washing. The structural design of the well was done with precision. Each rock is placed so that the well has a smooth even inner surface (Portner 1976, 12).





Exterior of the Soapstone Springs Schoolhouse. The teacher in the left photo is unknown. The students are possibly children of ranch hands who worked in the area. The tallest young man in the top row with the overalls and cap is Ed Guy who lived at Soapstone Prairie from 1908 to 1912 which therefore dates this photo to this time period. The young teacher in the right photo is Mary Blanchard who taught at the school in 1924; *courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton*

Soapstone Springs School was built as a one room schoolhouse consistent with other traditional country schoolhouses of the period. The first floor room could be partitioned off for different grades, while the basement served as a stage for plays and a storage area for equipment, books, and other supplies. Most likely a coal stove was located in one corner of the main floor for heating and cooking. Fuel for the stove would have been supplied by one of the many coal mines in the area such as Hess, Indian Springs or Bulger City. Slate blackboards could be purchased in either Waverly or Wellington (Gonzales 1998, 42).

It is unknown what happened to the clapboard siding or to the materials and desks inside. However, Jessen, who has visited and studied 120 historic rural school structures throughout Colorado, believes that the wood was probably used for fuel or fencing by a local rancher.

### **Birth of Rural Schools and the Development of School Districts**

The one room rural schoolhouse is now extremely rare. With a few exceptions, these symbols of the birth of education in early America are gone, but their idyllic memory lives on. The very first of these country schools was erected in Massachusetts in 1762. By 1789, with the construction of more and more schools the “district” method of education was created.

In the 1800s, with continuous progress in education, a central unit was created under the umbrella of a “township.” The board policies were uniform over all the schools in the territory. With student populations increasing, a larger vision was needed. By 1900, a county system was developed which was representational of all the people in the community and is the education method used by most school systems today.

## **Colorado Federal Land Grant**

Through several federal land grants passed by Congress in 1875, the United States government gave to each state land equal to 1/18th of the area of the state to be used to benefit public schools. In Colorado, 3.6 million acres were set aside for this purpose. The school land grant gave Sections 16 and 36 in every township to erect a school. In the event that both Sections 16 and 36 were in private ownership, the State could select alternate sections (Immigration 1919, 22). Soapstone Springs School is located on Section 36 of Township 12N, Range 69W. Authors Trulie Ackerman and Mary Dell Portner state in their local history text, *I Am Buckeye*, “For every nine square miles of populated land, a school was built.” (Portner 1976, 12).

The size of the rural schoolhouse, whether it had one, two or three rooms, was dependent on the census reports documenting the number of residents between 6 and 21 years old. Hamlets and towns developed in areas where it was convenient to travel by a horse and buggy. The site determination of individual schools took accessibility into account.

## **County District 55 and Soapstone Springs School**

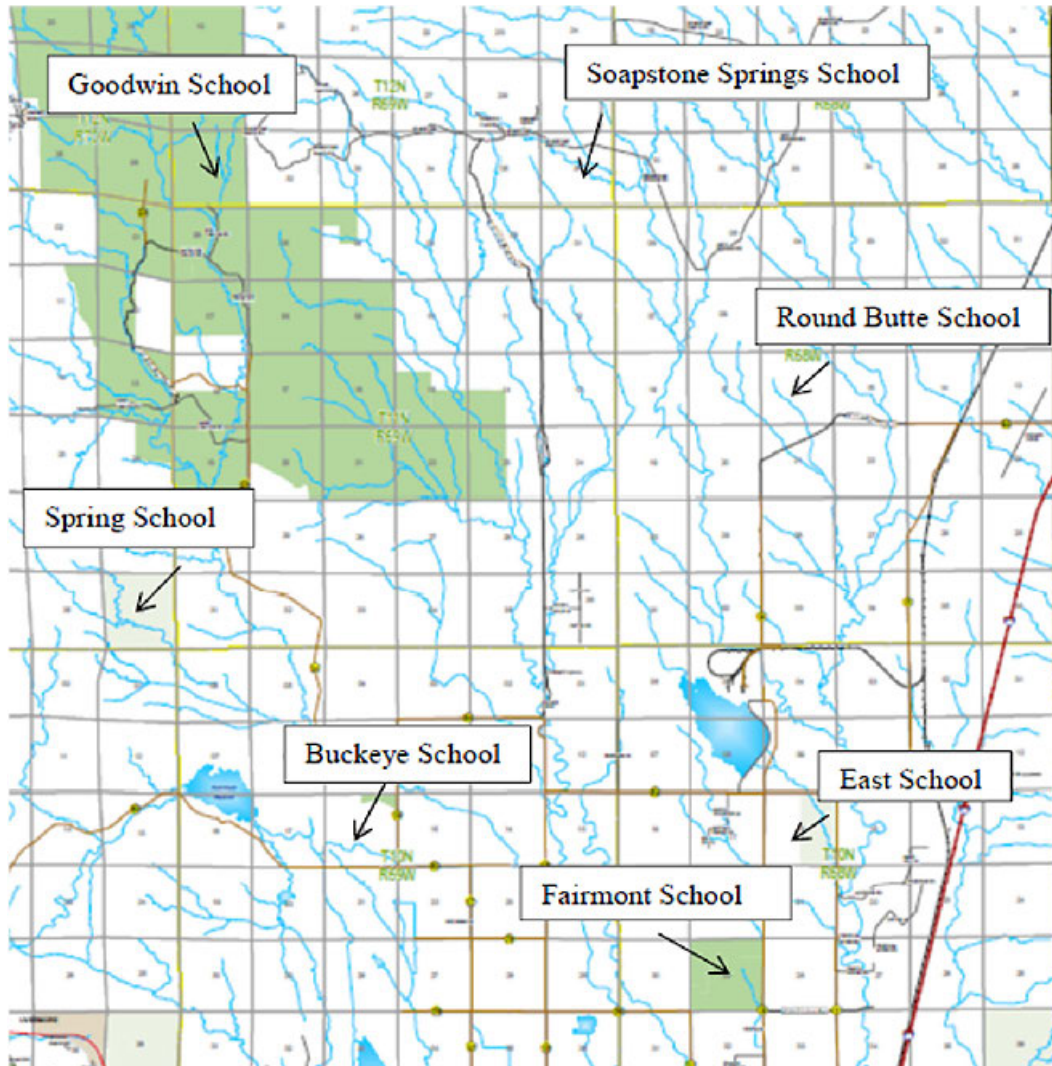
District 55 was formed June 1, 1888. The district name was Buckeye, with County Superintendent S. T. Hamilton in charge. Hamilton was also responsible for the formation of the boundary lines of all Larimer County schools (Kitchen 1967, 6). By 1899, Soapstone Springs School was part of School District 55. The district was 30 miles wide and 33 miles long (Portner 1976, 12). According to historian and author Arlene Ahlbrandt, “In the early 1900s there were so many children in the communities around Soapstone Prairie that local schools were needed. In 1888, Larimer County School District 55 was created and by 1899 Soapstone School was included.” (Martin 2009, 25).

Census records for the Bristol Miner precinct show an increase from 31 families at the turn of the 20th century to 82 dwellings by 1920 with immigrants comprising a large percentage of the residents. The reports show fifteen different native tongues other than English including French, Swedish, Swiss, Russian, Spanish, and Italian. (Riding 2012)

Along with Soapstone Springs School (1908-1926) there were six additional schools in District 55: East, Fairmont, Spring, Buckeye, Round Butte, and Goodwin. The dissolution of County District 55 occurred after 1967.

## **County Superintendent**

A County Superintendent of Schools served as the executive officer. The community within a district elected school boards for the purpose of planning their schools.



Location of schools (*Portner 1976, 9-13, Larimer County*)

A 1876 territorial law required that a superintendent visit each school in the district at least once a quarter (Kitchen 1967, 6) to oversee the condition of the school and check on curriculum, supplies, and equipment, and to also monitor the emotional and physical health of the teacher.

A Fort Collins Courier news article dated March 18, 1921, provides an account of the responsibilities and duties of a County Superintendent. The article reads:

Miss Emma T Wilkins, county superintendent, during the week has visited a number of schools including Spring, Dr. Goodwin's, Round Butte, Proctor, Mt. Hope, Summit and Soapstone.

She reports that teachers in the schools are making efforts to improve the lighting effects in the various schools by the use of window shades and the buildings are being kept in a neat and orderly way, that (illegible) floors are oiled and in



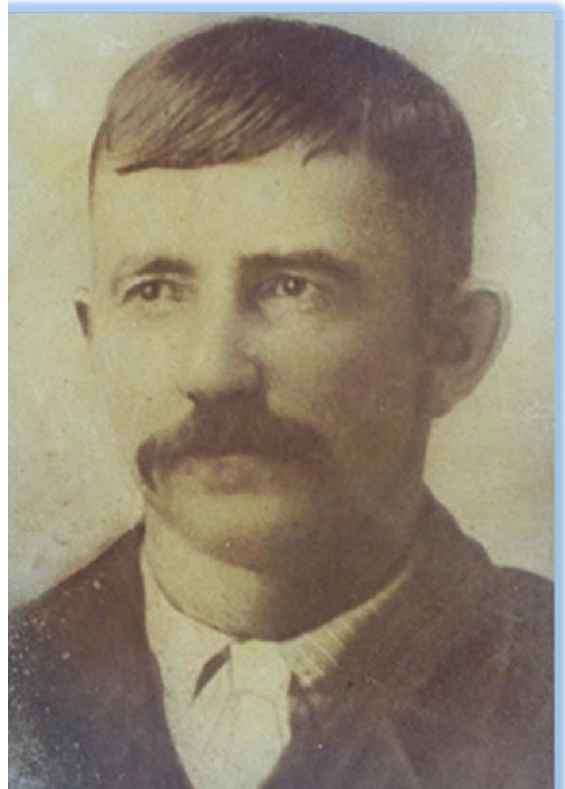
the Round Butte school special attention is being given to lighting and everything is being worked out as well as possible, though the building is the oldest and poorest in District 55.

### **“President”**

#### **George Washington Bear**

Early Soapstone homesteader, George Washington Bear, was the first president of Soapstone Springs School and a member of the board for the Goodwin School. Because of his famous name, his proud children liked to affectionately refer to him as “The President.” The Bear home is located approximately one mile northeast of the old school site and has more structural relics of the Soapstone homesteading era than any other location. Members of the Bear family homesteaded at Soapstone Prairie from 1917 until the 1960s. Six children were raised at the Bear homestead.

*George Washington Bear; courtesy of Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr, and Jack Fenton*



*Bear family at their homestead; courtesy of Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr, and Jack Fenton*



## The Soapstone Springs Schoolteacher: A Missionary Spirit

Early teachers were often young well-to-do women from “back east.” They often arrived at their prairie schoolhouse unaccompanied and unfamiliar with the challenges of living on the frontier. They were sometimes unprepared for the isolation and the frequent absences of students due to the chores at home. They didn’t realize that these chores were key to survival of their families. Several teachers in District 55 came from as far away as New York and Illinois to educate the pioneer children in the wilds of the west. Rattlesnakes and over-amorous cowboys were things they took in stride. They used their courage and fortitude to lasso the attention span of a pioneer student body. The schoolteacher gave the students attention, direction, and encouragement, and also lessons in social etiquette, for she had entered their rural world from a place very unlike their own.



Soapstone Springs schoolteacher Mary Phillips; *courtesy of Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr, and Jack Fenton*

Census records from 1910 to 1920 show an increase in the number of teachers in the Bristol Miner area. Oral history and newspaper accounts place at least four different teachers at Soapstone Springs School: Marion Harp, Marguerite Harned, Iola Vohnvahl, and Mary Phillips. Other teachers in the area from 1910 into the 1920s included 30-year-old Katharine Lynden and 24-year-old Elma Torris who both taught at the Goodwin School in Red Mountain, and Lillian Hatfield, a young wife of a ranch hand who taught at the Buckeye School in 1920.

According to a 1916 essay written by Charles Moore, a student in the educational department at the Colorado Teacher’s School (now University of Northern Colorado) “... school instructors in the rural setting were usually first term teachers...barely out of school and hardly out of their teens.” (Moore, *The Rural School Problem* 1916).

The teachers of prairie schools were usually well-educated and well-supported by the County Superintendent. By the early 1900s school boards and teacher certification training became more prevalent. Examinations for teachers’ certifications were held in Fort Collins the first week of April. Applicants needed to be only 18 years of age, have a high school diploma, and have completed at least ten weeks of college work. The fee was \$2.00.

On a national level, teachers in rural districts made a salary of \$100-\$300 a month, while their counterparts in the urban schools could make as much as \$500 a month. However, in the Soapstone area circa 1910, the wages were significantly less. A young teacher at Soapstone Springs School could expect to make \$53.00 dollars a month in wages; teachers in Fort Collins made \$77.00 a month. During this time it cost the county \$5.86 to educate a student for one year.

Moore provides reasons why a young woman would make the decision to teach at the turn of the century:

- 46% desired a good salary
- 46% looked at teaching as a stepping stone to better opportunities
- 4% had a genuine interest in books and study

### Teacherages

Standard schoolhouses of the day were typically built of clapboard with a stone foundation and basement. If the community had enough funds, a “teacherage” — living quarters for the teacher — was built near the school. Soapstone Springs did not have a teacherage and the instructors either commuted from Wellington and surrounding areas, or lived with a family. Mary Phillips, the last teacher to instruct at Soapstone Springs School lived with the Bear family at their homestead. She eventually married a cousin of the Bear family and her name became Mary Webster. Mary stayed close to her students especially once they became her family (Cathy Vlasak 2012).

### Marriage

“It’s hard to imagine today the nerve required of these young women to come to these seemingly wild lands unaccompanied, and perhaps not having a very clear idea of what was in store for them. They were pioneers as much as the ranching and homesteading women. Those who stayed often married cowboys and went on to become ranching women themselves.” (Martin 2009, 45-46).

Sometimes a rural schoolteacher got homesick in the isolated conditions and in sole charge of a boisterous student class. Turnover was frequent in the prairie schools, not necessarily because of dissatisfaction with the job, but because of marriage. The Warren Livestock Company and other large ranching organizations in the area were in full operation while Soapstone School was in progress. There were many young ranch hands available in the immediate area to catch the eye of a pretty young schoolteacher.



Mary Phillips; courtesy of Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr, and Jack Fenton



Mary Blanchard, Margaret Harned, Mary Phillips; *courtesy of Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr, and Jack Fenton*

Several miles southeast of Soapstone Prairie near Livermore, young ranchers and cowboys would wait for the bus to The Forks with the newest schoolteacher. According to a Livermore homesteader, "...unbeknownst to her, one of those cowboys already had dibs on her. The other cowboys would have to wait their place in line until she was married off and another schoolteacher was needed." (Martin 2009).

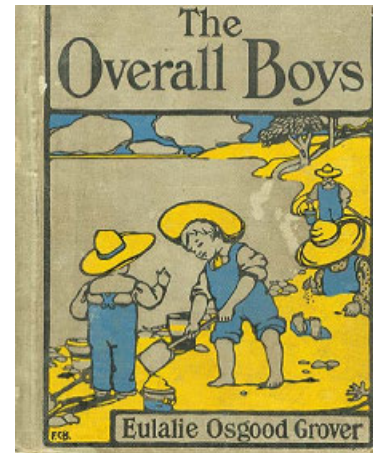
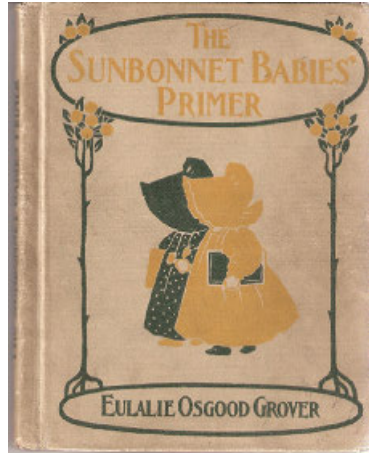
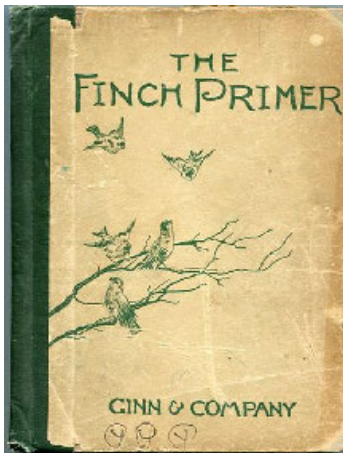
### Soapstone Springs School Teachers

From oral history reports provided by Bear family descendants Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton as well as census records and Fort Collins Courier newspaper articles we know of at least four teachers who taught at Soapstone Springs School: Marguerite Harned, Mary Blanchard, Iola Vonvhil and Mary Phillips. Mary Phillips married a cousin of the Bear's and took the name Mary Webster.

### The School Schedule

District 55 classes began each year around September 7th. The student's day was from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Children learned the basics such as math, reading, writing, and spelling. Soapstone Springs School offered curriculum for students up to the 5th grade; then the children traveled to Waverly, Buckeye or Carr, Colorado to continue their education. By 1926, there was only one child left at Soapstone Springs School: Evelyn Bear. Evelyn was taught by Mary Webster (nee Phillips), who stayed at the Bear home. Evelyn relocated to Buckeye School which opened its doors in 1925.

In 1910 the State of Colorado published Course of Study for the Village and Rural Schools by Katharine M. Cook. It was a manual for rural schoolteachers and suggested materials appropriate for each grade level (Cook 1910).



Left to right: Written by Adelaide Victoria Finch, the *Finch Primer* (1897) was a standard reading and spelling guide for first and second graders; Published in 1902, the enormous success of Eulalie O. Grover's *The Sunbonnet Babies* prompted the publication of a second set of reading and spelling course books called *The Overall Boys* in 1905.

Bear family homesteader descendants, Cathy Vlasak and Renee Schnorr have fond memories of listening to their mother, Evelyn Bear, tell how she loved the stories and books she was given for homework so much that she finished all of her reading in a day's time. Evelyn was the last student to attend Soapstone Springs School in 1926 (Cathy Vlasak 2012).

Children in rural districts typically did not attend school after the 8th grade. Their responsibilities on the homestead increased with their age along with their experience and ability to help with farming, gardening, and animal husbandry at home.

Each year, the District 55 community went on a "beet vacation" approximately one month after the start of school. This was not an official action by the school board of District 55, but rather a tradition. The break from studies would last two to three weeks while children helped their families harvest the beet crops. Classes would resume near the end of October. The teachers would take a retreat during the "beet vacation" as well.



12 year old boy, near Ft. Collins, Colorado topping beets; courtesy Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.



## Curriculum

In *Course of Study*, Cook addresses the educational needs of rural students and the need to provide them with not only a rounded education but applicable skills as well which fit their ranching, farming, or homesteading lifestyle. Cook says, “There is an ever-growing tendency to make the teaching of rural schools more efficient by teaching more in terms of the country and country life. This does not mean to throw out of the school the ordinary subjects of the curriculum, nor is it the wish to decry their value. We need to emphasize the necessity of an awakening to the fact that the “three Rs” are not an end to an education, but only a means to an end, that to really make them vital we must connect them to the child’s experience, environment, and life” (Cook 1910, 69).

In her book, she quotes Professor Warren of the Cornell Agricultural College, “While it may not seem desirable to make farmers, it does seem desirable to stop unmaking them.” (Cook 1910, 77).

Cook outlines the suggested curriculum for rural students through the 8th grade as follows:

### Reading, Writing, Spelling, and Grammar

Cook suggests the teacher develop in the students a ‘taste for beauty.’ She advises that “one period a week should be devoted to reading to her class in her very best style and afterwards discussing with them a bit of poetry, in which the thought, imagery, and expression are such as will appeal to the child’s sense of beauty and stir his emotional nature.”

Cook provides a general suggestion to the teacher: “The Chief aim in the study of language and grammar is the mastery of the mother tongue since a fluent and rich vocabulary is a choice inheritance.”

### Geography

Just as 2nd and 3rd graders are taught Colorado history in Colorado elementary schools today, in 1910 Cook suggested a “Study of Colorado” be part of the geography curriculum for the same age students with an emphasis on:

- Irrigation
- Mining
- Stock Raising
- Mountains and larger valleys
- Railroad Lines
- Cities and important towns
- History
- Climate
- Plants and animals
- Government
- Education

## History

Cook advises: “The chief aim in teaching history is to give the pupils who study it strong moral characters. They should be led to see how men and women have sacrificed their own interests to promote better institutions for humanity, and unconsciously these pupils should be brought to give what is best in them to their community, their state and their nation for the good of future generations.”

Historical literature for students at the time included bible stories, Greek mythology, Tales and Customs of the Ancient Hebrews, Roman Life in the Days of Cicero, Knights of the Round Table, and Longfellow’s Hiawatha, as well as in-depth American and European history for 7th and 8th graders.

## American History in Action

In 1910, a year after the end of Theodore Roosevelt’s administration, the “Rough Rider” president took a trip to Cheyenne, Wyoming to visit a political friend named Francis Warren. Warren owned a very large sheep and cattle company on Soapstone Prairie. President Roosevelt is known to have ridden through Soapstone from Cheyenne or from one of Warren’s ranches called Terry Ranch, to hunt black bear in today’s Red Mountain Open Space. The homesteading children of Soapstone Prairie would not have had to buy a ticket or wait in line to shake his hand. The fortunate students would have had front row seats to witness the famous Roosevelt riding across the prairie possibly near their school house.

## Physical Education

In 1910 it was believed that boys and girls should be separated for physical education as it was thought that males required more strenuous exercise than girls. Typical physical education for girls was gymnastics, folk dancing, and marching. For boys, it included football, baseball, and athletic track. For both sexes, physical education emphasized breathing and posture.

## Physiology and Hygiene

In 1910 it was thought by school officials that too much emphasis was being given to bones, nerves, and muscles and not enough on hygiene (Cook 1910, 40). Therefore Cook’s manual provided rural schoolteachers with a guide to educating their students on proper hygiene including:

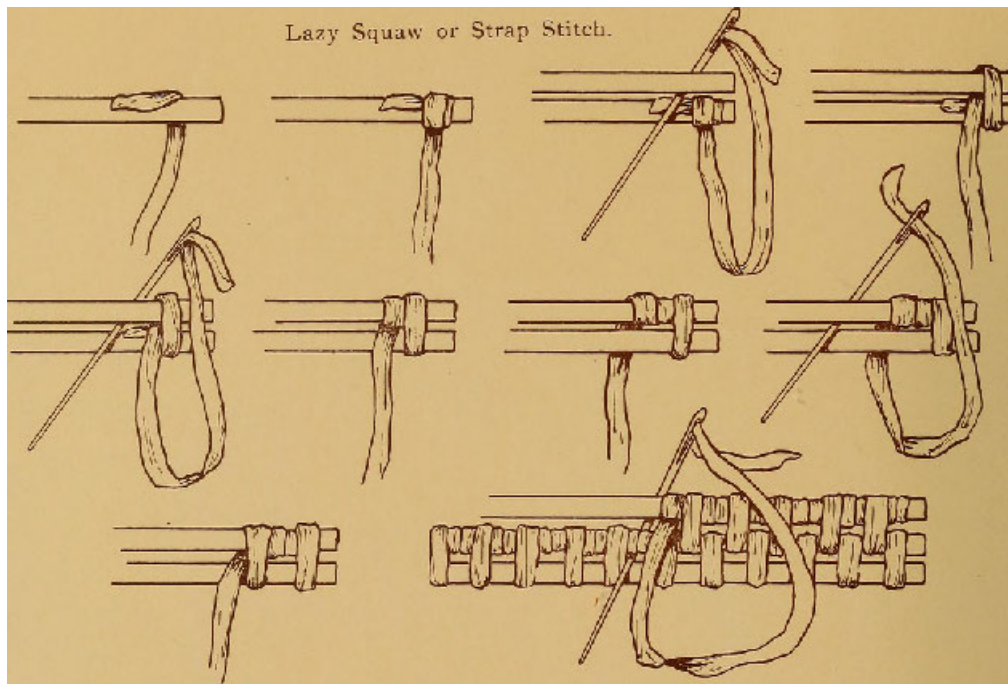
- See that the hands and face are clean.
- Talk to the children about the need of cleanliness of the person, the home, the school, and the community.
- Talk to the children about eating, sleeping, fresh air, and sunshine.
- Talk about disease germs and how they get into the body. Mention the danger of putting pencils or anything else that was used by another into the mouth.
- Also emphasize dental hygiene.

## Music

The rural schoolteacher would need to be educated or at least somewhat familiar with music and musical notes. If not, Cook suggests that teaching music “can be done by any earnest teacher with a degree of enthusiasm into the spirit of song teaching and song making.” Cook suggests songs to be taught the rural student as Home Sweet Home, Jesus Lover of My Soul, Suane River, Old Kentucky Home and Silent Night.

## Hand Crafts

Students were taught weaving, basketry, braiding, and sewing. The Lazy Squaw Stitch was a more complex type of basket weaving for the older students. The rural schoolteacher used natural resources for crafts such as corn cobs for dolls and furniture, milkweed for boats or chariots, and feathers for headgear or trimming dolls’ hats.



*A Graded Course in Cord, Raffia, Lacer Work and Sewing for Elementary Schools* by Earl, Anita Mills. Publication date 1913; courtesy Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

## Drawing

Because of its inherent subjectivity, this course was based on “manual training and the observation of color and form in nature.” It was also suggested that the teacher purchase, frame, and hang a notable artistic masterpiece in the class room to encourage students and broaden their knowledge of art. Art was taught once a week and included materials such as pad and paper, pencils, watercolor, clay for modeling, scissors, and paste.

### Nature Study and Elementary Agriculture

Cook defines Nature Study: “It is spirit, a spirit which should be part of the teaching of every subject of every classroom...to inspire him to have a living and ever increasing interest in everything that lives and is.” Cook believed that “the commonest things of the outdoor world formed the best material for nature study and encouraged teachers to look to their natural environment for material.” (Cook 1910, 70).

Some of the curriculum included;

- study of the seasons
- weather observations
- study of plants
- poultry husbandry
- study of Colorado as a great farm

Prairie schools were usually not ventilated and did not have enough room or facilities for equipment or supplies other than the standard curriculum, therefore recess was offered several times a day. With the open plains as a playground, games such as croquet or horse shoes were popular.

### **Social Studies and Domestic Studies Introduced to District 55**

As the culture changed in America so did its curriculum. Home economics became increasingly important and the system of serving hot soup was introduced to the schools in District 55 in November 1926. It was inaugurated at Buckeye School. The teacher of the Buckeye School at the time, Miss Jesse Trower, initiated the concept during the cold winter months. She devised a system which the children were divided into two groups which took alternating turns doing the work: the girls prepared and served the soup while the boys built the fires to warm it and cleaned the eating area. The children were then graded on “the excellence of their work”. All of the schools in District 55 were provided this opportunity for a hot homemade lunch and a lesson in domesticity.

Authors Portner and Ackerman also address the advent of home economics in *I Am Buckeye*:

It was at this school (Springs School) that the first hot lunch was served. A committee of two older girls would start making the soup from a donated soup bone and put the milk on to heat for the cocoa at recess. By lunchtime, everyone would enjoy a hot meal. (Portner 1976, 13)



# Ranching

During the peak grazing season from June through October, many visitors to Soapstone Prairie may have the opportunity to watch a real round up in progress or encounter a herd of cattle foraging along the trails. Soapstone Prairie has been ranched from the 1860s to the present day. The Lindenmeier Ranch (LR) and the Warren Livestock Company (WLC) operated on Soapstone Prairie.



Folsom Grazing Association cattle round up at the south lot; *courtesy of Suzy Riding*

## Early History of Ranching in Northern Colorado

Sheep and cattle ranching came to the northern Colorado area in 1864, soon after the 11th Ohio Volunteer Cavalry set up a Civil War fort four miles south of Laporte, Colorado, sixty miles north of Denver. This location was later named “Fort Collins” after the Lieutenant Colonel who gave approval for the site. With the protection of the soldiers and cavalry now in the Cache La Poudre Valley, settlers and homesteaders began arriving. The primary income for these early residents was growing hay and cat-

tle for miners in Central City and Black Hawk, Colorado. Larimer County wasn't even surveyed until 1868. Free grazing didn't end until 1904 so many of these pioneers ran their livestock on the open range north towards the small but burgeoning new town of Cheyenne, Wyoming.

During the "free grazing" or "open range" era a rancher could run his stock freely. He or she simply needed to settle, homestead, or outright purchase a small tract near a running spring or stream. The pastureland was limitless, bound only by the conflicts of the personal interests of neighbors.

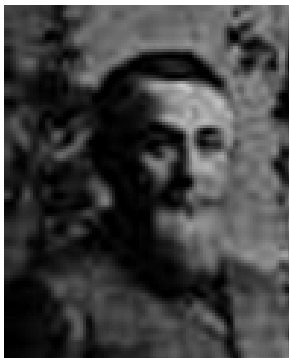


Whitcomb (above) settled his ranch on the corner of today's County Road 82 and Rawhide Flats Road. Visitors to Soapstone Prairie Natural Area recognize this as the corner where the pavement ends and gravel begins. Rancher Eldon Ackerman now owns the property; *courtesy of Fort Collins Museum of Discovery*

One of these early ranchers was an ambitious and entrepreneurial man named Elias "Pap" Whitcomb. Whitcomb came from Massachusetts soon after the arrival of the cavalry and set up a tipi near the fort on Jefferson Street in Fort Collins. Whitcomb lived there with his Sioux wife for several months. He was the first in the county to purchase a small herd of Texas cattle and he also acquired a small starter herd of Mexican Merino sheep. With the increase in homesteading in the vicinity of Fort Collins in the late 1860s and 1870s, Whitcomb headed north where there were fewer neighbors and more pastureland. He settled in a flat area surrounded by limitless hills of buffalo grass and blue grama and situated his homestead on a knoll just west of Boxelder Creek.

This was an ideal location for a new rancher. The area had plenty of water, nutrient-rich grasses, and room to grow. Whitcomb's ranch was located at what is now the intersection of Buckeye Road (CR 82) and Rawhide Flats Road (CR 15) approximately 18 miles north of Fort Collins. Late night dances and parties at his ranch house attracted many cowboys, settlers, drifters, and Northern Arapaho. Whitcomb Street in Fort Collins is named after him. The street was also the westernmost boundary of the Civil War military outpost which would eventually be called Fort Collins.

In 1875, Whitcomb sold his land to Noah Bristol, a Vermont native who had moved to the area just a year earlier. Whitcomb then took his livestock operation to Cheyenne where the Union Pacific Railroad had a depot and stockyard. Whitcomb had friends in the sheep and cattle business in Cheyenne, including its newest member of the territorial senate, another young ambitious Massachusetts's native named Francis Emory Warren.



Noah Bristol; courtesy of  
Fort Collins Museum of  
Discovery

Bristol continued growing sheep and cattle at the former Whitcomb property and developed it as an economic and communication hub for the surrounding community. Bristol Station had a post office, with Noah Bristol serving as postmaster, and a depot for the Colorado and Central Railroad. Bristol became president of the First National Bank in Fort Collins, sold his livestock, and moved his family to town in 1880. He kept ownership of the property, and by 1889 the area was so well known that Noah's ranch and small development of buildings which included a hotel and small mercantile, was called Bristol Miner Precinct.

The latter half of the name for this community was William Miner. Miner typified the standard livestock owner at the time: he was wealthy, a native of the eastern coast, influential, and well-connected to other large business owners in northern Colorado and southern Wyoming. These included land broker Abner Loomis, mill owner Benjamin Hottell, and politician/rancher Francis Warren. Miner and Warren owned eight ranches together in the 1870s and the two were good friends.

According to authors Mary Dell Portner and Trulie Ackerman in their local history book *I Am Buckeye*, the first voting place was "the bunkhouse which was located northeast of 'Ackerman's shack.' The voting area included all of his ranch—east to the county line—north to the Wyoming line—west to the foothills, and south to Portner's south line, thus including Miner's ranch, which is how the name of 'Bristol Miner Precinct' came into being..." (Portner 1976, 8).

German immigrant William Lindenmeier and his son William Lindenmeier, Jr., became two of the most influential ranchers in the area. Three of Soapstone Prairie's homesteading families found employment with the Lindenmeiers. The famous Lindenmeier

excavation site was named for William Lindenmeier, Jr. who owned the land where the Smithsonian Institution's camp was located.

William Lindenmeier, Sr. arrived in the United States in 1852 at the age of 14. At the start of American Civil War he joined the reorganized First Colorado Cavalry and was honorably discharged at Fort D. A. Russell in Cheyenne at the close of the War in 1865. Two years later, he and his new wife, Katharine Hueber, gave birth to a son in Denver. The boy, William Lindenmeier, Jr. was the second white child born in Denver. The couple also had a daughter named Katarina.



German immigrant William Lindenmeier (left) was one of the first ranchers at Soapstone Prairie. In 1884 he purchased property in the ponderosa pines where he grazed cattle. His son, William Lindenmeier, Jr. (right) took over in 1911 and thrived as a stockman until 1941 when he sold the property and retired from ranching. The elegant woman in the center is the matriarch of the family, Katharine Hueber; *courtesy of Charles Lindenmeier*

By the 1870s William and Katharine were living in Cheyenne and trying their hand at the livestock business. Lindenmeier, Sr. became a member of the Larimer County Stock Growers Association and purchased a quarter section of land near the grove of ponderosa pines on Soapstone Prairie for the purpose of running cattle. In 1886, when his home in Cheyenne mysteriously burned down, he relocated his family to Fort Collins. Now nearing adulthood, an ambitious William Lindenmeier, Jr. entered the livestock business as well as owning a jewelry store on College Avenue in Fort Collins. By 1911, Will Jr. had purchased his father's original quarter section and added three more whole sections bought from the Union Pacific Railroad. He was now running 3,000 head of cattle from the ponderosa pine grove to Boxelder Creek. The remnants of Lindenmeier's stone ranch house can still be seen in the lush valley on the west-central side of Soapstone Prairie.



## The Open Range at Soapstone Prairie—1860s to the turn of the 20th Century

During the ranching era of Whitcomb, Lindenmeier, Bristol, and Miner, Soapstone Prairie Natural Area was “open range.” Sheep and cattle operations freely grazed their livestock over thousands of acres of prairie grassland in northern Colorado. In 1878 there were an estimated 50,000 cattle and 75,000 sheep in Larimer County. Each May through June, a communal round-up brought in all the cattle from the various owners so they could count new calves, brand all the cattle, and separate out a percentage for shipment to slaughter houses.

Professional cowboys on a round-up circuit moved north through the county helping ranchers gather and brand their herds. Both the Bristol Miner Station and Jack Springs were used for round-ups. Jack Springs was the last site on the roster and the round-ups here usually took place near the end of June. Jack Springs is located on the Plover Trail at Soapstone Prairie Natural Area.

In 1901, a local cowboy from the Iron Mountain Ranch, located several miles northwest of Cheyenne, entered the Cheyenne Frontier Days steer roping contest. He didn't win but he was handy with a rope and even better with a .30-30 Winchester rifle. That cowboy was Tom Horn and won many rodeo contests. He was also a well-known cattle rustler detective. Horn was known to spend a lot of time at the Windsor Hotel on Larimer Street in Denver and might have ridden through Soapstone Prairie from his cabin at the Iron Mountain Ranch to the big city. However, in 1902, his days riding this prairie would come to a close when he was arrested and taken to trial for the murder of a 14 year-old boy named Willie Nickel. Nickel's father, Kels Nickel, owned a cattle ranch several miles north of Soapstone Prairie in southern Wyoming and was a suspected small-time cattle rustler. It is surmised that Horn mistook young Willie for his father when he shot him in July of 1901. After many months of trial, Horn was found guilty and hanged in Cheyenne on November 20, 1903. He's buried in Columbia Cemetery in Boulder, Colorado.

Tom Horn's career of harassing and occasionally exterminating small cattle ranchers and rustlers was fueled by the fierce wars for pastureland.



Warren Livestock Company employees at the Bear Homestead in the late 1920s. The Bears held a round-up on their property in the first part of May from 1917 to 1929. Ranch hands from the Warren Livestock Company or professional cowboys on a round-up circuit were hired to bring in the cattle; *courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton*

The winter of 1886-1887 was particularly brutal. A million head of sheep and cattle perished and it was known as “The Great Die Off.” With a good percentage of their livestock now gone many ranchers were forced to make the decision to either go bankrupt or start over. The value of the herds that were left in the wake of the devastating winter storms increased exponentially as well as the value of the fertile “open range” in which to keep the herd growing. Homesteaders moving into the county, and settling on 160 to 320 acres or more depending on the particular land act they filed, decreased the land available for grazing as well. When barbed wire fencing was introduced after 1874, and became more common by the 1880s, it was primarily used for keeping sheep in a pasture and keeping cattle out. Most ranchers in northern Colorado did not use fencing until around 1900 and the area continued to be free grazing land until then.



Southern Wyoming ranch hand and suspected assassin Tom Horn;  
*courtesy of eyewitnesshistory.com*

The Wyoming Stock Growers Association (WSGA) was formed in Cheyenne, Wyoming in 1872 for the purpose of facilitating roundups and to address the issue of cattle rustling. Early Soapstone Prairie area rancher Elias Whitcomb was a member, along with William Lindenmeier Jr., and a Fort Collins mercantile owner and stockman named Peter Anderson. By the 1890's Whitcomb owned the Standard Cattle Co. out of Cheyenne. It is suspected that Whitcomb may have hired a private detective to root out rustlers on his property; one whom would end up dearly departed from this world in 1891. One of the WSGA's more publicly recognizable members was the ambitious rancher politician who was recently appointed as the new State Governor of Wyoming, Francis Emory Warren.

These large ranchers were experiencing a loss of their cattle, not only to winter storms, but to smaller cattle companies, and “nesters” whom were known to snag a stray “maverick”, an orphaned unbranded calf, that would come near their homestead and keep it as their own. However, most small ranchers and homesteaders did not rustle while some large livestock operations were known to increase their herd by illegal means.

To support the honest small livestock owner and settler, the Northern Wyoming Farmers and Stock Growers Association (NWFSGA) was formed in 1891 in Johnson County, Wyoming with a man named Nate Champion as the lead round up boss. The powerful WSGA, based out of Cheyenne, did not approve of this outfit which they perceived as organized rustling and decided to step in. On April 5, 1892 a Union Pacific Railroad three-car special pulled into Cheyenne, loaded with several dozen Texas gun-

men, who had been hired at an exorbitant cost of \$5.00 a day each, for the purpose of ridding Wyoming of small time cattle thieves.

The gunmen headed north towards Buffalo, Wyoming and then east to the KC Ranch where the NWFGA trail boss Nate Champion was camped in a line shack with several other unsuspecting ranch hands. In an ensuing gun battle Nate was killed on April 9, 1892. In the meantime a posse of 200–300 small cattle ranchers had gathered in pursuit of the gunmen. With the Texas party now in danger, Wyoming Governor Amos Barber put a wire in to President Benjamin Harrison who called in the state militia and the conflict was contained. The Texas gunmen were rounded up and sent back to Cheyenne to be held at Fort D. A. Russell primarily for their own safety.



Ranch hands in northern Colorado circa 1897; *courtesy of Fort Collins Museum of Discovery*. The frame for the photo is a snapshot of an actual frame located on the wall of an abandoned saloon which the Warren Livestock Company ranch hands would frequent on weekends; *courtesy Suzy Riding*. Through oral history we have learned that women from Cheyenne, Wyoming would be transported to the saloon to entertain and dance with the ranch hands. The saloon is located on the old Lincoln Highway on Meadow Springs property east of Soapstone Prairie. The saloon has not been in service since the 1960s; it's on private property and is not accessible to visitors.

### **Two Soapstone Ranchers Involved in Johnson County War**

Of those members of the WSGA who were arrested and sent to trial for the murder of Nate Champion and Nick Ray, were two Soapstone Prairie area ranchers, Elias Whitcomb and Lindenmeier's partner, Peter Anderson. Both were acquitted.

However, Whitcomb was ordered to pay a \$1,000 for fare to send the posse hired by the WSGA back to Texas. Another Soapstone Prairie rancher, (later elected to the US Senate representing Wyoming) Francis Emory Warren, denied any knowledge of the event.

By this time, the famous Goodnight-Loving Trail which drove thousands of head of cattle from Texas north to the Union Pacific Railroad stockyards in Cheyenne was also ending its enterprise in the area. It had been in business since just after the Civil War and completed its last cattle drive in 1890. Under the impressive and courageous hand of a young Texas ranch owner, Oliver Loving and a Confederate Civil War veteran, Charles Goodnight (who developed the “chuck wagon”), a trail was blazed from Belknap, Texas west to Fort Sumter, New Mexico and then north to Cheyenne where Texas longhorns would be boarded on a train and shipped east for slaughter. Many of the Soapstone Prairie ranch hands and cattle operations had a lot of contract cowhands and 2,500 head of cattle from the Goodnight-Loving outfit. The route took them just three miles east of present day I-25. The cattle were known to stampede several times a day and it wasn’t rare for the company to lose a few in the event. It is reported that stray Texas longhorns could be found as far west as the foothills. It’s possible that the cattle present in northern Colorado today may have a small percentage of renegade Goodnight-Loving longhorn in their bloodlines.



*Cattle grazing; courtesy of Fort Collins Museum of Discovery*

### **Corporate Ranching Emerges at Soapstone Prairie**

By the 1890s the days of the open range were coming to a close and larger, more organized livestock corporations were beginning to emerge. In 1910 three of these large livestock companies existed in the area of Soapstone Prairie: Buckeye, Lindenmeier, and Warren. The Buckeye Land and Cattle Company, which had purchased its property from Noah Bristol in 1905, was located at the old Bristol Station at the junction of today’s Buckeye Road (CR 82) and Rawhide Flats Road (CR 15). This Ohio outfit (named for their state tree) raised cattle, sheep, wheat, and beets on the property. The Buckeye was in business for two decades before selling out to the Denver Trust Company in 1927.

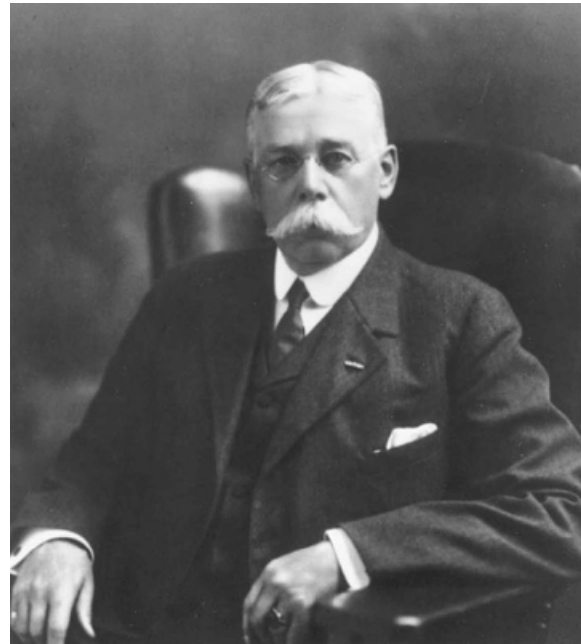


The Lindenmeier Ranch was a large operation which was situated directly on the west central section of Soapstone Prairie. It was owned by William Lindenmeier, Jr. and employed homesteaders in the area as ranch hands. The Buckeye Cattle Company also paid Lindenmeier to run its cattle on a portion of his fertile valley. Lindenmeier sold his property in 1941, just shy of fifty years in the livestock business and died just one year later.

The Warren Livestock Company was created out of humble beginnings in 1870s Cheyenne, with a small starter herd of Mexican Merino sheep. It grew to mammoth proportions covering a quarter of a million acres, supporting tens of thousands of livestock, and hundreds of employees for over 80 years. It was described by one of its foreman as “the vast empire.”

### **The Vast Empire of the Warren Livestock Company**

In 1868, a handsome 24 year-old veteran of the Civil War arrived in the Dakota Territory from his hometown of Hinsdale, Massachusetts. Having served with the 49th Regiment of the Union Army during the war, Francis Emory Warren was accustomed to conflict, and as a decorated officer he had experience in managing large numbers of troops while under fire. Now on the western frontier he would encounter another battlefield and what he had learned through his trials would come in useful.



The Dakota Territory (the area we know now as Wyoming), was host to army scouts Buffalo Bill Cody and Wild Bill Hickok, and the infamous Calamity Jane. The battles on the western front were not fought between the North and the South but between ancient native cultures and expansionists, the homesteaders and the ranchers, the railroads and the rustlers, each ready to go to war with their tomahawk, shovel, spike mall, or lasso, fighting for their share of the vast prairie grassland.

A Civil War veteran railroad employee, and mercantile owner, Francis Emory Warren created the Warren Livestock Company (WLSC) in Horse Creek, Wyoming in the 1870s. The WLSC eventually spanned over a quarter of a million acres in southern Wyoming and northern Colorado, occupying three quarters of the land at Soapstone Prairie Natural Area. F.E. Warren Air Force Base in Cheyenne is named in his honor; *courtesy plains-humantities.unl.edu*

Warren settled in Cheyenne and quickly secured employment at a furniture store. In his first few months as a clerk at the mercantile his funds were not sufficient for either

a dwelling or hotel room and he spent his nights curled underneath the same counter he served customers over during the day. Warren saved his earnings and along with a family friend from Massachusetts, W. W. Gleason, eventually purchased the furniture store (Wishart n.d.) (Biographical Directory of the United States Congress n.d.).

Many of Warren's customers were livestock owners or wives of sheep and cattlemen who used his mercantile to outfit the home quarters of their ranches. Through these contacts, he began to realize that there was a future in the livestock industry and he wanted to be a part of it. By the early 1870s he began purchasing a small type of sheep called the Mexican Merino. Warren also bought land along streams and any other property with water. At this time the west was still "open range" and if a stockman could control the water, his grazing ground was unlimited. Francis Warren's first property was located on Horse Creek near Cheyenne, Wyoming.

Beginning in 1874, Francis Warren entered the political scene, first as a member of the territorial senate and eventually became mayor, a two-time governor, and finally US Senator in 1890. His political ambitions took him away from his responsibilities as a fulltime rancher. However, his positions gave him the strategy, power, and leverage he needed to further the success of his ranching enterprise. In his political career, he served as the chairman of several senate committees including the committee on Irrigation and Reclamation of Arid Lands, Committee of Claims, and Committee of Agriculture and Forestry which helped to shape the accomplishments that many ranchers today are able to achieve (Drake 2013).

Warren's success both as a rancher and politician are extraordinary. In the early days of ranching in the southern Wyoming and northern Colorado area sheep and cattlemen were bitterly opposed to one another. Sheep would graze down the vegetation, including weeds, until there was nothing left, and then trample on the dry soil so that new grasses could not grow. This left little grazing pasture for the cattle and conflicts ensued.

In 1900, William Bachelder, a Larimer County sheep grower stated in the *Fort Collins Courier*, "I soon found out that a sheep man was hated above all other." Upon being elected a delegate of the Constitutional Convention he was later told by a cattle rancher that the man would have voted for him as well if he hadn't been a sheep man. For Francis Warren to have successfully balanced politics and sheep growing is quite an accomplishment. Being a full time politician took a significant percentage of Warren's attention and he employed his business partner W. W. Gleason to manage the enormous livestock operation (Watrous 1911, 135).

Francis Warren's name was connected to many noteworthy people of the day. Warren and President Theodore Roosevelt worked together in Washington D.C., and were riding partners and good friends. In the summer of 1910, Roosevelt visited his companion



At left, President Roosevelt and Francis Warren in Cheyenne, Wyoming in 1910; *courtesy Dave Cook, The Way it Was*. At right, the Terry bunkhouse where Roosevelt stayed; *courtesy Charles Phillips*

in Wyoming and spent three days captivating crowds at Frontier Days in Cheyenne. The trip also included a night at Warren's headquarters on Pole Creek, 16 miles north of Cheyenne where Roosevelt charmed the ranch hands with poems and stories over coffee and Havana cigars. Wyoming State Tribune reporter William C. Deming was present and quoted Roosevelt speaking to the assemblage:

*"Beauty is fine, but strength is finer. The strength of character and of mind and the body that enables a man to conquer a wild horse or conquer these broad plains—boys this is the life!"*



Teddy Roosevelt; *courtesy of Dave Cook, The Way it Was*

Roosevelt also stayed at the Warren Nagle Mansion on 17th Street in the heart of old town Cheyenne. Roosevelt's favorite room in the luxurious home was on the second floor and he smoked many cigars on the veranda on the south side of the structure.

The Terry Bison Ranch just north of the Wyoming border on I-25 and east of Soapstone Prairie also boasts of putting the Rough Rider President up for a night or two in a bunkhouse. Roosevelt hunted black bear in today's Red Mountain Open Space and most likely would have ridden through Soapstone Prairie Natural Area from Terry Bison Ranch. The Warren Livestock Company was in full operation on Soapstone Prairie at this time and the many ranch hands and herders could have gotten glimpses of the famous president and had stories to tell around their own bunkhouses in the evening.



At the start of the Spanish-American War in 1898, Roosevelt, who was then the Assistant Secretary of War, was given permission to recruit a regiment of cavalry to fight in Cuba. Appointed Lieutenant Colonel, Roosevelt employed an assortment of cowboys, Native Americans, frontiersmen, Buffalo Soldiers, and eastern athletes to make up the 1st United States Volunteer Cavalry, also known as the “Rough Riders.” One of those cavalymen was a young West Point graduate and Battle of Wounded Knee veteran named John Pershing.



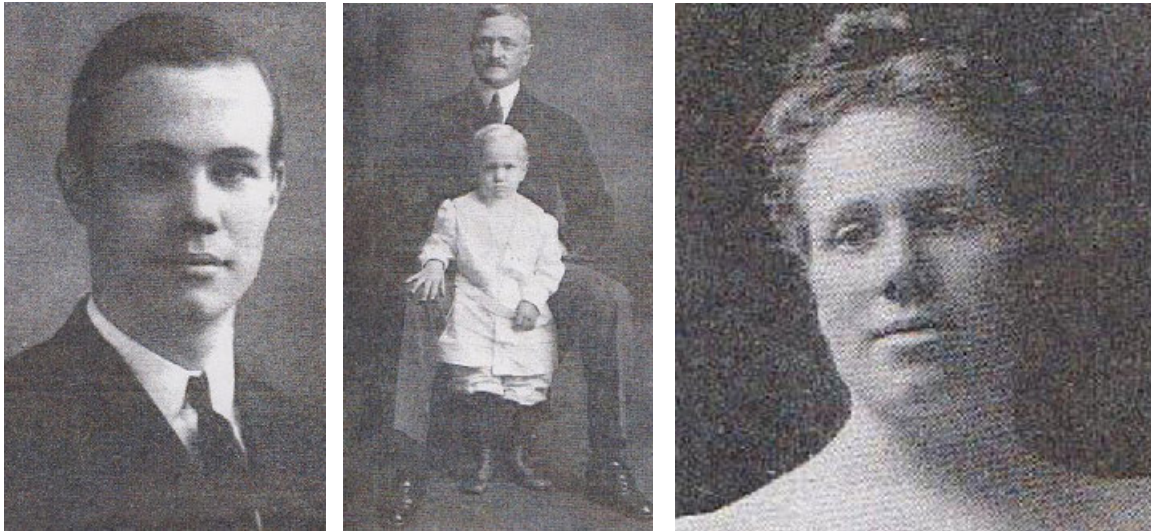
Francis Emory Warren's son-in-law, Captain “Black Jack” Pershing (left) was an international military hero. Here he is crossing a river in Mexico in 1916. He also worked at his father-in-law's ranch with the other hands. His home was located directly above today's Red Mountain Open Space. When he lived there it was called “the cabin on the ranch”, today we know it as Belvoir Ranch (right); *courtesy City of Cheyenne, Wyoming*

During the Spanish-American War, Pershing impressed Roosevelt with his courage. Another Colonel called him “the coolest man he had ever seen under fire.” After becoming President of the United States in 1901, Roosevelt kept in touch with his fellow cavalryman and friend. In 1905, Pershing married Helen Francis Warren, the daughter of Francis Emory Warren and as a wedding gift Francis gave the couple the “cabin on the ranch” now known as Belvoir Ranch. The Belvoir Ranch is located just over the Wyoming border to the northwest of Soapstone Prairie. When the Pershing's lived there the accommodations included a race track and a tennis court (City of Cheyenne n.d.).

Roosevelt was present at the wedding of John and Helen. Although Roosevelt had pushed for Pershing's increased rank three years earlier, soon after the marriage Roosevelt promoted Pershing to Brigadier General. Pershing led the 1916 expedition to conquer Pancho Villa, mentored famous Generals Eisenhower and Patton, and was promoted to the highest military rank achievable, General of the Armies. He also helped around his father-in-law's ranch by humbly pitching hay with the ranch hands.



Captain Pershing received the nickname “Black Jack” because he had commanded an all-black regiment of the 10th Cavalry while campaigning in the west in 1896 (Missouri n.d.). They were known as the “Buffalo Soldiers.” Local Buffalo Soldier historian and reenactor, John Bell, relates that the Buffalo Soldiers could have easily patrolled the area around Soapstone Prairie as they were stationed at Fort D. A. Russell in Cheyenne under Pershing’s command (John Bell 2014).



Fred Warren (left); *courtesy Dave Cook, The Way it Was*. Helen Francis Warren (right) and John Pershing were married in 1905. They had four children: Helen, Ann, Warren and Margaret. While Pershing was away on a campaign in Texas, Helen and the three daughters perished in the Presidio fire in San Francisco on August 27, 1915. Pershing (center) is sitting with the only survivor of the fire, son Warren; (Service n.d.); *courtesy Dave Cook*

In 1910, the management of the Warren Livestock Company was handed over from Gleason and his sons to Francis’ son Fred Warren, upon his graduation from Harvard with a Civil Engineering degree (Burns 1971).

At this time, the Warren’s personal friend and political partner, Roosevelt, was busy purchasing lands in the west at a swift rate for the use of irrigation of dry-lands, as well as for conservation and preservation. In 1902 Roosevelt enacted the Newlands Reclamation Act which placed 230 million acres in the western states under federal protection. Aware of the destruction of the natural resources of the eastern and southern states, Roosevelt created the 1906 Antiquities Act which proclaimed 18 National Monuments. In addition, 150 National Forests, including fourteen in Colorado were created under Roosevelt’s administration during this time. Roosevelt’s aggressive move to purchase private lands for public use caused conflict with many ranchers, miners, lumber operations, and others who used the natural resources for an income. Now forced to purchase deeds and fence their land, many were forced to sell out. These “sell outs” paved the way for the gigantic cattle operation, the Warren Livestock Company. Land in the area was so inexpensive at that time that potential ranchers

could name their own price. Down-and-out farmers and homesteaders would take any price to get out. Fred Warren paid as low as a \$1.33 an acre for property in and around Soapstone Prairie (Service, Theodore Roosevelt n.d.) (Burns 1971).

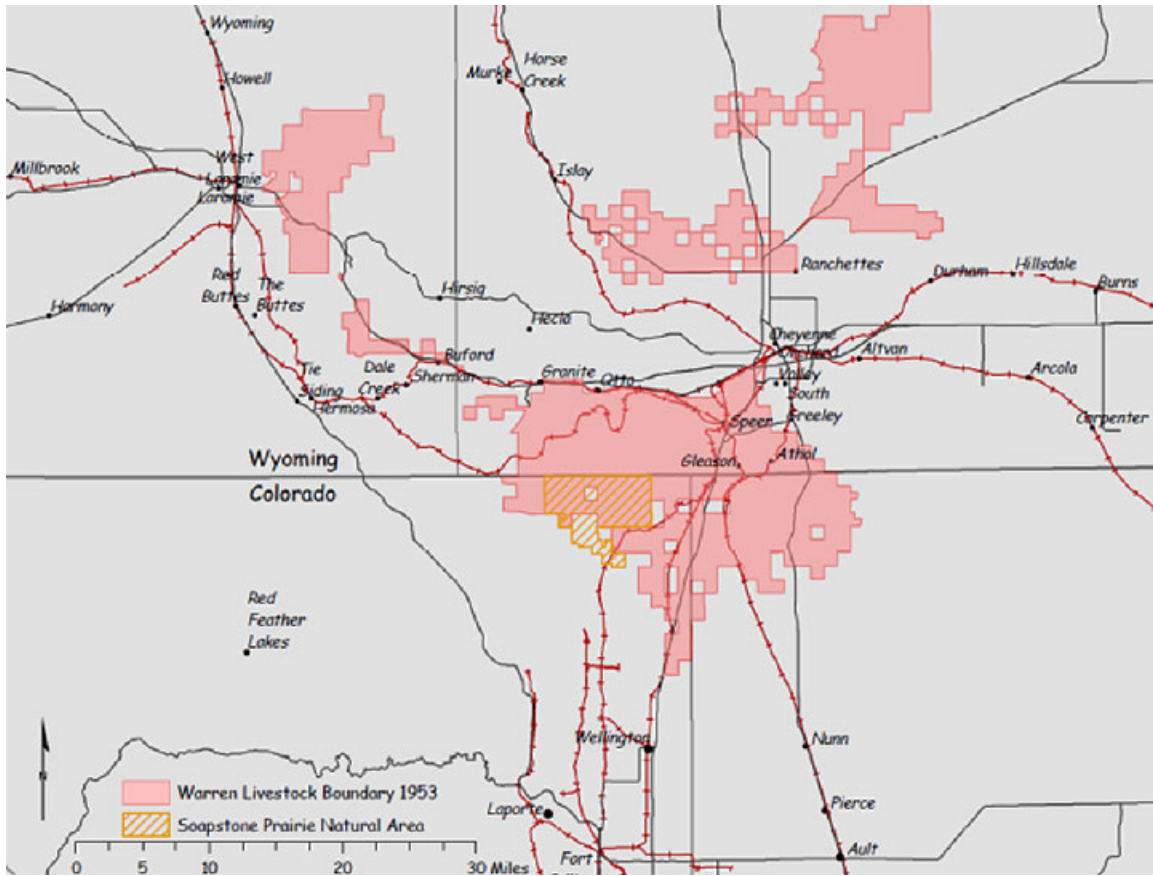
Along with other large ranching operations in the area, the Warrens utilized a method of purchasing land called “checkerboard control.” This involved buying all of the either odd or even numbered sections in a township where the company wanted to graze, creating a checkerboard look on the landscape. This made it nearly impossible for another rancher to purchase enough sections to graze in that area without trespassing. The “checkerboard control” system was later found to be illegal (Cook 1980).



Reenactment group, the Buffalo Soldiers of the American West, Inc., during an event at Soapstone Prairie; *courtesy of Eileen Sake*

### **Warren Livestock Company (WLSC) Land at Soapstone Prairie**

After the turn of the twentieth century the Warren’s fenced land extending from approximately 30 miles north of Cheyenne to fifty miles west and 25 miles south through Soapstone Prairie and beyond. In all, the “vast empire” consisted of approximately 500 square miles of land, or 320,000 acres, in Wyoming and Colorado. Roughly 154,240 acres were purchased through deeds and 64,000 acres were leased through the states of Wyoming and Colorado. Another 101,760 acres were leased from the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR), private individuals, and the federal government.



Map of Warren Livestock Company holding in relation to Soapstone Prairie; *courtesy Douglas Cain, City of Fort Collins.*

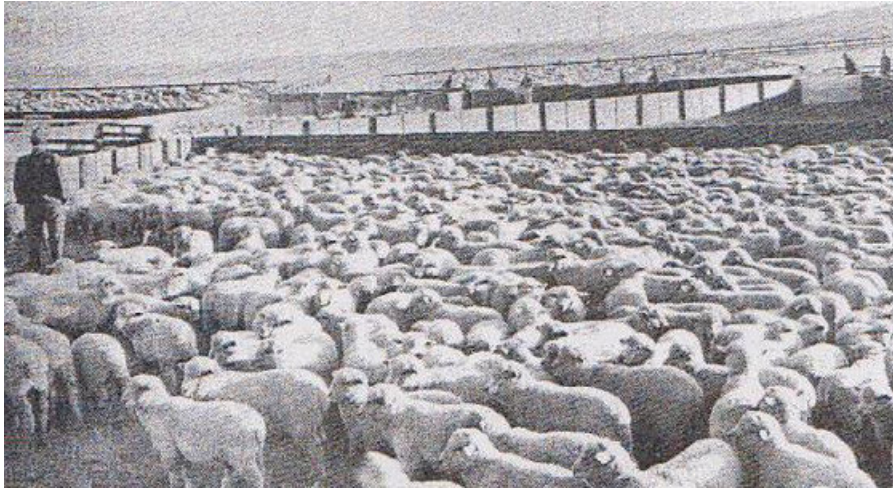
The Warren Livestock land on Soapstone Prairie as we know it today consisted of approximately 48 sections running from the Wyoming border south to Jack Springs, west past the Lindenmeier excavation site and continuing to the Cheyenne Rim. The lower west section of Soapstone Prairie near the ponderosa pine grove and the bottom trail of the Cheyenne Rim were not Warren holdings; they were owned by William Lindenmeier, Jr. until 1941. The Lindenmeier excavation site is so-called because the Smithsonian received permission from William Lindenmeier, Jr. to explore for evidence of the Folsom culture on his property. The top of the Cheyenne Rim, Canyon, Mahogany, Towhee, Pronghorn and Plover trails were all Warren Livestock ranch land. Their holdings exceeded much past the Soapstone Prairie boundaries. The Warrens also owned holdings as far south as just north of Wellington, Colorado and east through Weld County to the Chalk Buttes near Pawnee Grassland. (Cook 1980).

In contrast to the quiet of Soapstone today, from 1910 to approximately 1963 this was a fully operational cattle and sheep ranch that employed hundreds of ranch hands each year. With tens of thousands of sheep and cattle roaming this 'vast empire' the sights and sounds of Soapstone Prairie would have been much different than they are today.



## The Development of “The Vast Empire”

Equipped with a Harvard education and knowledge of the ranching industry running deep in his veins, Fred Warren set out to create a sustainable, systematic ranching operation.



Warren Livestock Company sheep on Meadow Springs; *courtesy Dave Cook, The Way it Was*

Fred first convinced his father that they needed to purchase higher quality sheep. The small Mexican Merinos could not produce the wool and mutton needed to keep the business going on the decreased land size. Fred recognized they needed a larger more durable sheep with a higher-quality wool which could be put out in the winter and paw the snow for food. He enlisted the help of University of Wyoming professor Dean Hill. Together they began breeding for a type of sheep that would do well in the harsh landscape. Each year they took 10% of desirable females out of the herd and bred them with the best rams including a Columbia breed. Within several years, 70% of the herd consisted of the quality they desired and those sheep were called the War-Hill breed. These sheep could each produce five pounds of wool and up to ten pounds in a good year. The War-Hill sheep weighed 65-75 pounds; the Merino sheep weighed 35-45 pounds. The final product was a sheep with a mix of both coarse and fine wool. It took five to ten years of breeding to produce the War-Hill breed. Under Fred Warren's management a higher percentage of lamb crops were produced which weighed 25% more at shipping time and sheared 50% more wool of a much better quality than before he took over the operations.

The Warren Livestock Company carried as much livestock as they could on the prairie without overstocking the land and depleting the soil but still making a profit. For the Warren Livestock Company that healthy number for their operations consistently became 40,000 sheep and several thousand cattle.



## Improvements in Grazing

The most important element in raising stock is an adequate water supply. Reservoirs, springs, and streams were the primary methods for watering the stock. Fred Warren did not want livestock and herders more than three miles from any water source. This required the Warrens to build windmills. Each windmill cost several thousand dollars to construct with depths reaching 60 to 400 feet underground. Each adult sheep or cow required three gallons of water per day to stay healthy.



Well driver ca. 1930. The Warrens built 53 camps scattered across Soapstone Prairie and Meadow Springs; each camp was equipped with a well spring; *courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton*

Large losses of sheep in winter and early spring snow storms led Fred to update the lambing sheds by building them larger and supplementing the sheep with extra feed in the winter. Supplements included pellets made from alfalfa, cottonseed, and soy. Pellets were ideal in this part of the country as they would not blow away in the almost constant wind. The larger lambing sheds could withstand the winds and keep the sheep safe in the winter and during lambing season.

To be successful it was crucial that early ranchers be knowledgeable about their resources. Without knowledge of the land, a livestock operation could suffer heavy losses through inadequate or inexperienced herders, as well as the accidental ingestion of poisonous vegetation. The grassland at Soapstone Prairie consists of western grasses including buffalo grass, blue grama, western wheat, and cheat grass which ranchers learned that livestock thrived on. However, other vegetation such as larkspur, death camas, Drummond's vetch, and henbane could be fatal to a valuable herd (Cook 1980).

Larkspur is a valuable food for sheep but it is deadly to cattle. Warren herded his cattle across Soapstone Prairie after the sheep had eaten the poisonous vegetation and both species thrived. Employing an experienced and dedicated sheep herder was crucial. Good herders knew how to move a flock across a meadow giving them enough time to eat the spring weeds before a herd of cattle would be grazed through.

Today the Folsom Grazing Association, which is a direct descendant of the Warren Livestock Company, grazes approximately 800 head of cattle on an easement on Soapstone Prairie Natural Area. Current Folsom Grazing Association president Willie Altenburg provides this description:

Well, it did work if you rotated them properly. Because sheep will eat everything and it will eat the best if you just turn them out. But if you rotate them across first with the shepherd and make them eat the weeds or the poorest. In fact, there's a weed there called larkspur ... it's odd because larkspur will kill cattle and it won't kill sheep. And larkspur is the first thing green in the spring. It grows generally in the canyons and the coulees and in the sand draws and generally in the rough country. And it's the first thing green. And the Texans, when they brought their cattle up here in the spring, they found...they didn't know about it, and they found that as they tried to fatten their cattle in the spring, they'd move their cattle in it, they'd eat it and they'd die. It was disastrous.

They found that if they moved sheep across there first, the sheep would eat the larkspur but they'd have to make them eat it. They'd have to take bands of sheep across first and eat it. And if you ate the larkspur with sheep you could run cattle behind them, so it's beneficial. But you have to make them eat it. Well there's nothing worse than a lazy shepherd sleeping in his hut, letting the sheep eat the grass, letting the cattle come behind it, there's nothing left to eat but the larkspur – it's the worst of all worlds. So, you have to have a good shepherd who looks after the sheep to eat the larkspur and then the cattle can come behind it and it works good. But you see, it's good management again. And like anything, good management works; bad management doesn't work" (Martin 2009, 35).



Bull on the Pronghorn Trail at Soapstone Prairie Natural Area; owned by Willie Altenburg and is part of the Folsom Grazing Association which has easements for grazing at Soapstone; *courtesy Norm Keally*

Needle grass, prevalent at Soapstone Prairie, was also injurious to sheep. If the sheep were being grazed in a high needle grass area occasionally the seeds of the grass would embed in the wool. Through time, the seed will make its way to the sheep's skin with a corkscrew action. The seed can infest the skin and create a mesh like mat between the flesh and wool. Sheep with this condition were unsellable at market.

## Land Stewardship

The extraordinary land stewardship under Fred Warren and the management of the Warren Livestock Company is recognized even today by many in the field of ranching, ecology, and wildlife. In the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery document, *Soapstone Prairie Natural Area Oral History 2006-2008*, the voices of those in the field acknowledge the Warrens conservation efforts even while grazing tens of thousands of sheep through Soapstone Prairie.

Ecologically, these landscapes have evolved under grazing pressure - maybe not by cattle, but certainly by bison and other grazing animals. So if you look at just flat biodiversity and the short grass, ranches and protected areas are about equal. So a lot of the animals have adapted to grazing regimes - they're there if it's grazed; they're not there if it's not grazed. So it's important from trying to manage for high levels of biodiversity that you need that structural component on the landscape. And what I mean by the structural component is grazed versus non-grazed areas does promote species that utilize that landscape that wouldn't be there otherwise.

—Daylan Figgs, Senior Environmental Planner and a rangeland ecologist for the City of Fort Collins' Natural Area Department

The grassland has evolved with grazing. So prior to ranchers being here, we had bison. There were probably 30 million bison on the Great Plains. Again, 80 million pronghorn out there, and I can't tell you how many prairie dogs were out there, but a lot. All those are grazers - they eat grass. And if you look at the grassland birds that are out there, they actually like different structure. Some of them like tall grass, some of them like medium grass, some of them like short grass... if you were to take grazing off of Soapstone, that would be a disturbance. It would be like taking fires out of the ponderosa pine... when you take grazing off of a grassland system, what you see come in as a disturbance are weeds - that's a huge problem with taking grazing off of an area. Of course you can graze it so hard that you might get a lot of weeds as well, but if you don't graze it at all, you'll have weeds. Another thing that happens is that productivity decreases. So if you're interested in protecting wildlife, you want the productivity of the grasslands to be high. Productivity is higher if you have some kind of grazing. Since we don't have bison anymore, the best we can do is this.

—Renee Rondeau of the Colorado Natural Heritage Program

I think grazing, historically, has been really beneficial to wildlife. If there's a well-managed, well planned grazing plan in place, which there has been apparently on Soapstone because you can tell that there's not a whole lot of noxious weeds there; there's a lot of available forage both for wildlife and for the livestock that are grazed there. So it's been well managed with grazing in place for many, many years. And I think it's important to continue that.

When you look at when the bison were plentiful in the West, other wildlife followed through where the bison had been. And it's because bison were enhancing habitat for other wildlife. And I think a well-managed, well-planned grazing plan also is going to enhance wildlife on Soapstone. And it does that through reducing noxious weeds. A bad grazing plan is going to increase noxious weeds, which we don't want. But a good grazing plan is going to hold them in check and its going to reduce dead and... dead grass and things like that. And when that happens it's going to allow the plants to grow, be more healthy, be more vigorous, the animals get to graze it, it keeps them healthier.

When we have healthier vegetation, we have healthier wildlife who are depending on the vegetation. So I think there's some sort of manipulation of vegetation needed and grazing is a really easy way to do it. There's prescribed burns, tilling, all kinds of different things you can do, but if you have a good grazing plan, the rancher, the farmer benefits, the cows benefit, whoever's using the cattle is benefiting and its also helping the vegetation and helping wildlife by keeping the decadent dead debris down and letting the vegetation grow."

—Nancy Howard, Colorado Parks and Wildlife

FGA president Willie Altenburg adds, "We are cattlemen, yes, but caretakers of the land first. And we've had many compliments on the ranch and how good it's taken care of."

### **Management of the Warren Livestock Company (WLSC)**

Before the turn of the twentieth century and early in the Warren Livestock ranching history there was no border between northern Colorado and southern Wyoming in regards to grazing. Warren ran his sheep and cattle on millions of acres of land. However, after the land was fenced and property lines defined, the Warren Livestock Company was comprised of two areas: the "north side" was on the Wyoming border while Soapstone Prairie was called the "south side. There was fierce competition between the north and the south as far as volume and quality of livestock.

Ash Gleason, son of W.W. Gleason, was the foreman of the south side during the early years. Other foremen of the south side included Park Smith and Walter Murphy. The south side was the larger running from Meadow Springs to north of Laramie which was the summer breeding and grazing ground. The south side encompassed 3/5 of the Warren livestock operation. The "vast empire" consisted of 53 camps with watering mills.





Aging Warren ranch hand bunkhouse (left) on the northern section of Soapstone Prairie near the Graves Camp; *courtesy Suzy Riding*. The remains of a sheep shed near Brannigan Springs at the Plover/Sand Wash trails junctions (right); *courtesy Dr. Brenda Martin*. Neither is in use today, but during the Warren Livestock era both were essential in protecting two of the most valuable commodities of the Warren's enterprise from occasional harsh weather of Soapstone Prairie; the ranch hands and the sheep.

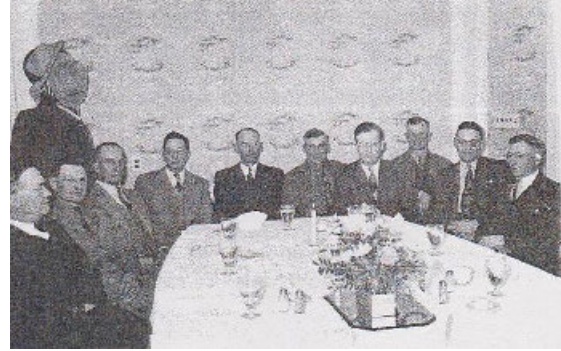
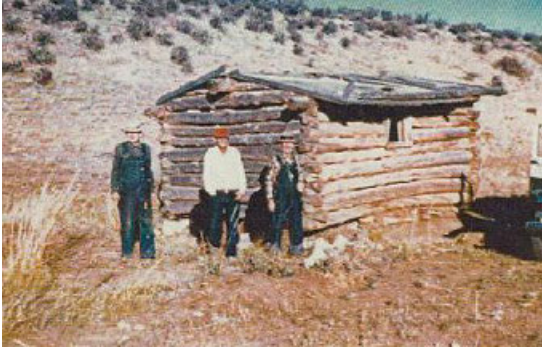
Most of the camps are now just a memory, but several of the sites are still in existence on Soapstone Prairie and the remnants of these can be seen from some of the trails today including Brannigan Camp, Jack Springs, and Graves Camp, all located on the Plover Trail. All of the lambing, shearing and hay holding camps were kept in tip top shape with fresh white paint and repairs during the Warren livestock era.



Soapstone Prairie homesteader and Warren ranch hand John Grimm; *courtesy Jeannie Loader and ancestry.com*

The Warrens were very hands-on managers and kept in close contact with their ranch managers and hired hands. Several Soapstone Prairie homesteaders worked for the Warren Livestock Company. John Grimm, who homesteaded in an arroyo southeast of the Entrance Gate Station, supported himself as a ranch hand for the Warrens from 1917 into the 1920s.

Three Roman family members were employed by the Warren Livestock Company for most of their lives. The Roman homestead is located approximately a half mile east of Round Butte. Round Butte is the largest butte southeast of Soapstone Prairie and can easily be pointed out at the North Lot. The three brothers were; Ben, Joe, and Domenic Roman.



Above left photo (center) is Joe Roman; *courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton*. Joe was born on Soapstone Prairie in 1912 in a homestead just east of Round Butte and lived his entire life in this area. He worked as a Warren ranch hand to support his wife Dorothy and son Keith. On either side of Joe are Bert and Ray Bear who also homesteaded at Soapstone Prairie. The Bear brothers never worked for the Warrens, but employed their ranch hands each May for their own round up. In the above right photo, the man second from the left looking at the camera is Domenic Roman; *courtesy Dave Cook, The Way it Was*. Dom is Joe's older brother. Dom was born in the homestead in 1909 and also spent a lifetime career with the Warrens. Dom was the equipment superintendent for the ranching company and spent many hours out of the saddle in a suit while he attended board meetings, which became standard during the corporate era of mega ranch outfits such as the Warrens.



The Welches homesteaded in an arroyo on the western edge of Soapstone Prairie. The Cheyenne Rim Trail travels past their site. The two Welch children raised here, Warren (far left) and Paula (left), both worked for the Warren Livestock Company. Paula married Ben Roman another local homesteader and WLSC ranch hand. Ben was killed by lightning while working the range in the 1940s. Paula is regarded as one of the best ranch hands of the WLSC; *courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton*

## The Sheep Herders

Running all the gearwheels of the Warren Livestock machine was a 24/7, 365-day-a-year, task employing upwards of 300 or more employees including sheep herders, a lambing and shearing crew, and a haying team.

Approximately two dozen sheepherders and their dogs were needed throughout the year. Sheepherders were usually of Mexican or Anglo descent and were in charge of 1,500 to 2,500 sheep each. The herder was crucial to the health of the stock. A good sheepherder had three qualities: experience, dependability, and a genuine interest in the health of the sheep. Because a good herder was one of the most important positions

in the company, the WLSC hired only the most experienced. However, during the last years of the Warren operation, as the good herders were beginning to pass away, drifters or other inexperienced herders were used without success. This is thought to be one of the causes of the downfall of the WLSC. Basque herders from Spain were used later and were considered to be some of the finest herders. From the Warren Livestock's perspective, the young Basques had the same passion and commitment to the health of the sheep that the early Mexican herders possessed. However, they required higher wages and by the time of their arrival the WLSC was beginning to see its final era.

### **The Cowboys**

The lambing and shearing season in early spring and summer required many hands. The supervision of this part of the operation was overseen by experienced employees and foremen who had been with the company for many years. The crew primarily consisted of local men who helped out each year, eager newcomers wanting to learn the trade or men the Warrens hired from an employment agency out of Denver. Turnover could be high because the employment agency drifters or enthusiastic newbies were not aware of the hard work that awaited them, or were not accustomed to the harsh elements of the prairie and found it not to be the romantic lifestyle they had envisioned. Other hired hands included the "Montgomery Wards"—young men who were enthusiastic about becoming real cowboys and outfitted themselves in the latest cowpuncher wear to impress his new employers. Unfortunately, this clothing included high-heeled cowboy boots which were not suited to running around on foot over the prairie ten hours a day. The cowhand would eventually get sore feet and would be asked to leave or get better boots!

### **The Haying Crew**

The Warrens grew their own hay which required a separate crew for harvesting. The hay team consisted of 30 men who had various positions such as mower, baler, rake driver, and cook. Four to six crews were hired during haying season. There could be as many as 180 men employed by the Warren Livestock Company during haying season which lasted from June to September or October.

Because of its generous springs and rich soil, Meadow Springs has been the location of haying operations dating back to the 1860s. Fort Collins town founder Joseph Mason, and his partner, cavalry officer Captain Asaph Allen, employed over a dozen men at the Meadow Springs site to put up hay for the miners in Central City in 1868. This operation was overseen by Mason's older brother Augustine. The Captain disappeared at a train station in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1869 while Mason died an untimely death just twelve years later. Before his demise Mason also ran a stage line near Meadow Springs for several months in 1867.





Above is a photo of one of the Warren Livestock Company's most reliable and dedicated sheep herders "Little Indian Joe"; *courtesy Dave Cook, The Way it Was*



Above (top) photo was taken at the Warren's Meadow Springs camp; *courtesy Suzy Riding*. Notice the ranch hands' names and dates of their employment branded into the wall. Above (bottom), former Soapstone Prairie Ranch Foreman Kevin Stone herds a group of Folsom Grazing Association cattle in the summer of 2013; *courtesy Kristin Powell*. Round Butte is in the background.



The haying crew ca. 1930s; *courtesy Charles Phillips*



## The Fencing Crew

Starting the first or second week of November most employees were laid off for the season but those fortunate enough to stay on were put to work repairing fences, mending lambing sheds, and supplying sheep camps. To build fences, the Warrens used a one-of-a-kind post hole digger designed by Fred Warren that may have been modeled after the oil derricks which were popping up at a fast rate in the Soapstone Prairie and Wellington area during the 1930s when this apparatus was in use. Secondhand Union Pacific Railroad boiler pipes were used as posts and were driven into the ground by the rig which consisted of a 30-foot driver hauled by a wagon and team of horses or mules. The fence crew was just three men and a team to pull the wagon. The work entailed staking the fence line, driving the posts, and stringing the wire. One mile of fence could be completed in three days. Remnants of the Warren fence are still visible on Soapstone Prairie and surrounding areas and are recognizable by the distinctive Union Pacific Railroad boiler pipes. The machine still exists and is located on private property at Duck Creek just north of Soapstone Prairie. There is no other structure like it in the world.

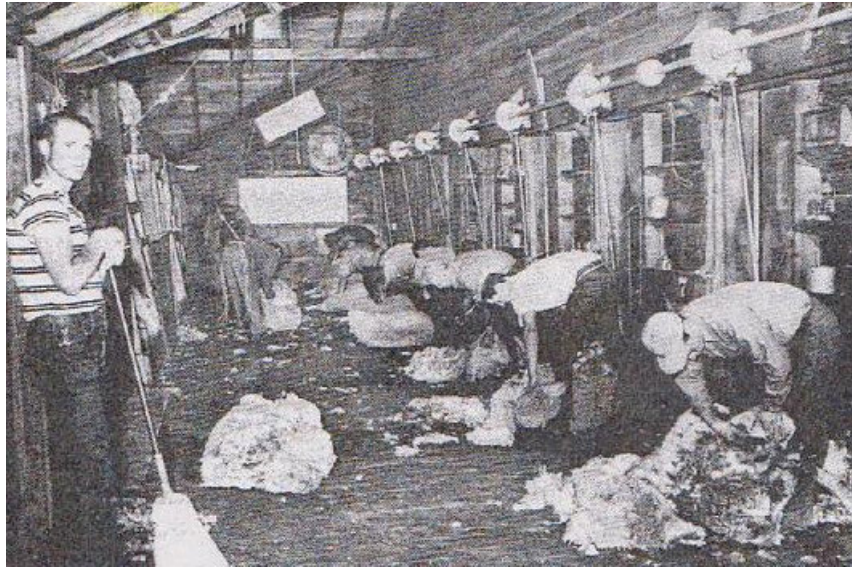


Above photos show the skeletal remains of the post hole digger as it lays on Duck Creek property north of Soapstone Prairie; *courtesy Suzy Riding*. The bottom photo is the top of a UPPR boiler pipe after it was pounded into the ground by the digger; *courtesy Charles Phillips*. If Soapstone Prairie visitors look closely as they travel up Rawhide Flats Road to the Gate Entrance Station they can still see many of these posts lining the road. Below is a photo of the post hole digger in action in the 1930s; *courtesy Charles Phillips*



## The Shearing Crew

Shearing season began in May after most of the ewes had “dropped” their lambs, and continued through the second week of June. The south side shearing plant was located on Meadow Springs which today is southeast of Soapstone Prairie. Upwards of 40,000 sheep would be sheared during a season here which boasted 15 shearing machines, five more than the north side. Wool buyers would come directly to the shearing plant and look over the sheep and make an offer.



Shearing crew at Meadow Springs; *courtesy Charles Phillips*

Before the machines were in use, sheep shearers used basic sheep shearing cutters. A shearer was paid for each sheep he sheared, so time was of the essence. Typically, a shearer could do the work on one sheep every three minutes. His wools were set aside and counted up before shipping. With 40,000 sheep on the property, this task usually took ten days to two weeks depending on weather conditions and the size of the sheep.

Once all the sheep were sheared and branded with ink, they would then be herded north and west toward summer grazing range near Laramie, Wyoming. The prairies of Soapstone would be a blanket of white and wool as tens of thousands of lambs and ewes moved across the area. Their route would take them several days through today's Soapstone Prairie trails including the Plover, Pronghorn, Mahogany, Towhee and Canyon, as they made their way northwest towards the Wyoming border.



Shearing crew; *courtesy Charles Phillips*



## The Lambing Crew

The lambing season, which took place from late March to early June, is described as the “sheepman’s nightmare” because of the severe weather that could be experienced on the prairie during this season. Without good management and proper shelter many ewes and lambs could be lost to early spring storms. Each lambing camp was staffed by eight men. With the construction of the lambing sheds under Fred Warren’s management, the loss of lambs during the spring decreased significantly. Ewes that were getting ready to have lambs would be called the “drop” herd. Technically, lambs are not born, but dropped.

Jobs at the lambing sheds included sweeping tags on the shearing floor which entailed sweeping up the wool that had been sheared. Sweeping tags was one of the lowest jobs a ranch hand could get. If they proved themselves and demonstrated a genuine interest they could work up to shearing. Other jobs included tying fleece and rolling wool. Pay was \$35 a month.



Several hundred horses were needed to keep the Warren Livestock Company running smoothly. Horses helped with herding, haying, and with the gathering of the new lambs that were born on the prairie. The horses above are taking a load of wool to Cheyenne; *courtesy Charles Phillips*



Interior and exterior and of one of the many Warren Livestock Company lambing sheds. This one is located southeast of the Plover Trail and is on Meadow Springs property; *courtesy of Suzy Riding*

Each lambing shed could house 2,000 ewes. The herder would take the ewes out during the day and new lambs that were dropped in a field were put in a wagon with their mothers and taken to shelter in the lambing sheds. The wagon which was used to haul these new sheep and ewes was affectionately called the “lambulance.”

Rusty and Flora were the two horses that pulled the lambulance. Early in their careers with the Warren Livestock Company, Rusty and Flora were not comfortable with their employment as ranching horses and would often stampede into the countryside while they were hooked up to the equipment. If you were present at Soapstone Prairie in the 1930s you might see these two horses running wildly across the prairie with a wagon bouncing along behind them, wheels and wood flying off in all direction. It is reported that they broke up more machinery than the Warren Livestock Company could afford.

However, with the patience and confidence of a ranch hand named Charles Phillips they eventually learned to love their work. Phillips was determined to make a good team out of them and on an early spring morning at Soapstone Prairie he quietly patted and talked to Rusty and Flora while he hooked them to a flatbed loaded with a 1,000 pounds of bedding straw. Upon realizing they were hitched, the pair began their standard rampage. Pulling and struggling at the weight they didn't get very far. It didn't take long before Rusty and Flora decided they had had enough. Phillips trained them on the lambulance and his training and diligence paid off. During lambing season, Phillips could whistle for the team while he was with a new ewe and lamb and the pair would come running from a hundred yards off and stand quietly while he loaded the bawling baby and mother into the lambulance. Under Phillips careful care, Rusty and Flora retired from their careers as one of the finest teams the Warren Livestock Company ever had (Phillips n.d.).

Rusty and Flora were not the only runaways and renegades on the prairies of Soapstone during the Warren Livestock era. A homesteader or cowhand could occasionally make an unexpected income from nabbing an escapee from Fort D. A. Russell in Cheyenne (now F. E. Warren Air Force Base). On occasion, a young draftee to the fort might get a little homesick or decide that the military wasn't the grand lifestyle the recruiter had made it out to be and would try to make a run for it through Soapstone Prairie. If the escape was successful and the boys made it to Wellington or Fort Collins, they might hop a ride on the Colorado & Southern Railroad. But more often than not, this wasn't the case. Once the young recruits were found missing the Fort alerted the authorities. There was a \$25 bounty pinned to their heads (Gonzales 1998).

### **The Ballad of Tom Bates**

In 1936, the prairies of Soapstone would be the stage for a more tragic story involving runaways. A good shepherd was crucial to the success of the Warren Livestock Company but they were hard to come by. The Warrens expected that the employment agency drifters they hired would last only a week or two before they would hightail



it to Cheyenne or Fort Collins and need to be replaced. Occasionally, they were asked to leave. Many of these young men would confess to their ranch bosses that they had never laid eyes on a sheep before much less knew how to keep them safe in a summer squall or brush fire. Losing an inexperienced sheep hand to the ever available bootleg in the area or the Lincoln Highway towards Cheyenne by thumb was a normal occurrence and one that the Warrens got over quickly. But, losing a good herder by tragedy was not customary and they did not easily recover from this.

On an August morning in 1936, two young boys, ages 14 and 12, escaped from a Golden, Colorado juvenile hall, stole a vehicle, and made a break for it north towards the Wyoming border. The teenage duo successfully navigated through Fort Collins and Wellington via the Lincoln Highway towards Cheyenne. However, anxious about entering Wyoming via the border entrance, the boys decided to turn west from the Lincoln Highway just southeast of Soapstone Prairie and head for the safety of the hills. Once on the property, they traveled north toward the area of Jack Springs, which today is located on the Pronghorn Trail. Jack Springs is easily found as there is still a tin shack approximately 20 feet X 10 feet which early ranch hands would use as shelter. Today it is vacant except for a community of prairie rattlers that occasionally make their home underneath the structure.



This sheep herders tin shack dates to the 1930s and is located on the Pronghorn Trail near the Upper Jack Spring junction which is the Z marker on the trail map. The shack is locked and not accessible to the public; *courtesy the City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Department*

A half mile north of this sheep shed, the boys met up with Warren sheepherder Tom Bates. It was right about noon and Bates had settled in at his own shack for lunch as he watched over his herd. The youths approached Bates' camp and got out of their vehicle. There was small talk about money and upon realizing he was conversing with young fugitives, Bates reached for his rifle. The boys overtook him and a scuffle ensued. One shot left Bates lifeless on the prairie. The two then dragged Bates' body into an arroyo and went back to his shack. Finding a pair of overalls they tied both the legs and arms and stuffed supplies from Bates' camp into the body of the clothing and threw it on the trail.

After hearing the gunshot, Francis Warren, Jr. who was making the rounds on his property at the time, drove his Cadillac into the area where he knew Tom Bates was camped and the location from where he heard the shot. As he approached, another shot rang out. A blast exploded on the driver's side and tore a hole through his white cotton shirt and his left arm. With his heart pumping and unable to tell from which direction and who was shooting at him, Warren sped east towards Terry Ranch. His heavy Cadillac sprayed a fan of dust behind it as it bounced over the prairie at breakneck speed. Within minutes Warren pulled into the gravel parking lot of the Terry Ranch bunk house and fell out of the car clutching his left arm, his white shirt and driver's side door of the Cadillac now drenched in dark red blood.



Francis Warren is the son of Fred Warren, and the grandson of Warren Livestock Company founder Francis Emory Warren; *courtesy Dave Cook, The Way it Was*



Railroad trestle near Carr, Colorado; *courtesy Suzy Riding*

Two ranch hands at the Terry Ranch, brothers Ed and Eldon Smith, put Warren into their vehicle and sped off toward Cheyenne for medical help. Amid the chaos, a call was put in for help and soon Sheriff Carroll and Deputy Brownny from Cheyenne were on the scene. Warren Livestock equipment superintendent, Don Roman, and ranch hand Charles Phillips related to Carroll and Brownny what Warren was able to tell them about the incident and the four took off in the patrol car to find the armed fugitives. Slowly working their way through abutments and valleys, the four canvassed the prairie. Sheriff Carroll made the decision to take the patrol car down a hill near a Colorado

& Southern Railroad trestle just south of Carr, Colorado. And there, huddled against the wooden beams were two small bodies shivering and shaking. Carroll pulled up and positioned the patrol car directly in front of the trestle. He expected to find derelicts, drifters, or seasoned moonshiners—but saw a sheepherder’s rifle next to the larger of the young boys. Deputy Brownny got out of the patrol car. As he approached the youths, the older stood and pointed the rifle at Brownny. The deputy grabbed the rifle, pulled it from his assailant and at the same time slapped the young boy across the face. The boys were put in the back of the patrol car with Roman and Phillips and eventually sent back to Golden. (Roman 2012) (Phillips n.d.).

## **Prairie Storms**

Summer storms can be devastating on this prairie with lightning, hail, and strong winds, so the journey during this season could ravage herds coming through. Careful management of the sheep was necessary to avoid losses especially after machine shearing came into use as the blades from the machines cut closer than by hand and left less protective wool. On several occasions during sheep shearing season, a summer squall would pass through unexpectedly dropping golf ball-sized hail on a herd. The storm would pass within minutes and the sun would again return, but left the prairie littered with hundreds of lifeless bodies of newly sheared lambs and ewes.

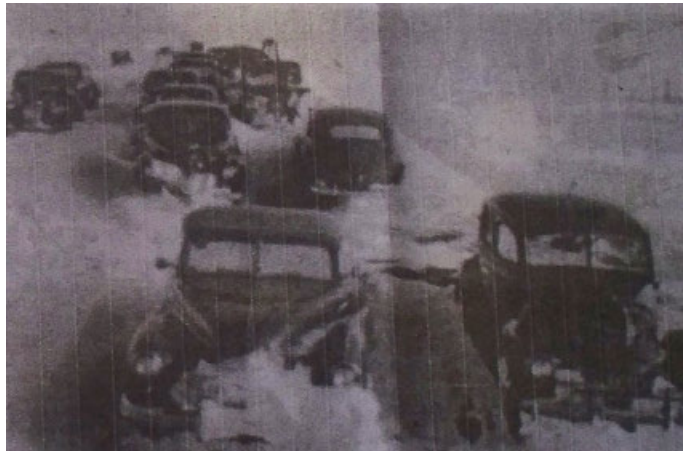
From rustlers and predators, to the end of the open range, livestock growers have had to endure many challenges and obstacles to their success. Severe weather was one of the deadliest to sheep and cattle. The fatal winter of 1886–1887 was called “The Great Die Off” because more than one million sheep perished in northern Colorado and southern Wyoming. To survive the loss and avoid bankruptcy, the newly incorporated Warren Livestock Company vigorously asked for the support of company stock holders in order to survive. They were successful. However, the company would experience another deadly and devastating winter sixty two years later in January of 1949. By this time, Senator Francis Warren, Sr. had occupied a plot at Lakeview Cemetery in Cheyenne for twenty years. In 1971, Warren Livestock Company foreman Dave Cook described the events of the 1949 blizzard. This historic event had enormous impact on the land, the livestock, and the people.

## **The Blizzard of 1949**

At 9:00 a.m. on Sunday, January 2, 1949, the National Weather Service broadcasted a warning of a severe winter storm approaching the area of northern Wyoming and southern Colorado. The estimated arrival time for the blizzard was 11:00 am. The storm, although fierce, was anticipated to move out of the area quickly. At the time of the report there were approximately 10 sheepherders on the range of the Warren Livestock Company including Soapstone Prairie. The winter had been cold and windy as usual. There was nothing in the atmosphere to warn a herder of an approaching disaster and many were scattered away from their camps.

A 45-year veteran of the Warren Livestock Company, foreman Dave Cook, received the weather report over his battery-operated radio while in his home at the company's headquarters in Pole Creek, Wyoming, 18 miles north of Cheyenne. Worried about his herders who would be unaware of the storm that was headed their way, Cook headed out in his car to warn the crews. Starting on the Soapstone Prairie side Cook began to work his way north trying to locate the sheepherders. Cook was able to find and warn one herder in the field before it began to snow. With no visibility, he was forced to make his way back home and take cover. But he knew that there were herders out there who would not be able to get back to their camps quickly enough and they and the sheep would suffer. By 5:00 p.m. it was still blowing hard and the power and telephone lines were all down. The Sunday evening weather report indicated that the storm would be clearing up by morning, but by Monday it was snowing just as hard.

Safely at home, Cook and his wife listened to the radio broadcast of the names of those who had not been seen since the storm started. Cook and his ranch hands felt helpless. But they also knew they risked losing their own lives if they ventured out to look for the stranded.



Stranded motorists near Soapstone Prairie; *courtesy Arlene Ahlbrandt and The Senior Voice*

On Tuesday afternoon, two days after the storm hit, ranch foreman Cook heard pounding at his front door. The door was frozen shut and he could not open it. He heard the voice of a man on the other side pleading for Cook to “please help.” Finally the man was able to communicate with Cook through a living room window. It was a man who had been stranded with many others on the highway near Cheyenne. He related to Cook that the folks on the highway begged him not to leave and that he would never make it alive. But he was willing to take that chance because the others were frozen and starving and would not survive if he didn’t. He told the foreman that there were about 30 people on the highway including a baby who was kept alive by one can of milk heated with a cigarette lighter. One man had lost both his legs and others suffered frostbite.



Cook was finally able to get his front door open and the two men went to the bunkhouse where the ranch hands stayed. The cowboys put on their coats and boots and bundled blankets around them and headed out into the storm to rescue the stranded travelers.

When the men reached the stranded cars, they quickly realized that all of the marooned travelers were in grave condition. Some had their legs or hands frozen and had to be literally dragged back to the ranch house where they were given warm blankets and food. While waiting for the storm to pass, the frozen travelers listened helplessly as their names were broadcast over the radio. When the storm finally subsided at 4:00 p.m. Tuesday, Cook was able to venture out and repair a section of the telephone line. He contacted the police to let them know he had thirty people at his ranch house. Ten hours later an army of ambulances, military vehicles, and snow plows came parading over a hill to rescue the stranded.

One young married man perished in the storm trying to find help for his wife whom he had left in the car during the blizzard. The wife was able to get a ride with some passersby but her husband did not make it. An experienced herder was also lost near Cheyenne.

While many sheep were saved, tens of thousands perished. When the storm cleared and caterpillar tractors were able to come in and remove them, the dead sheep were piled along the highway. The heaps of dead mutton were as high as the telephone poles. They were dug up 15-20 at a time, evidence that they had attempted to huddle together to survive. The loss of cattle ran into the hundreds. On the Soapstone Prairie side cattle were found frozen to death still standing up on all fours. The cleanup from this event lasted into the early spring. Dave Cook recalls, "During the many years as a foreman of the ranch, I saw many severe storms, droughts, what have you not, but in everything I experienced, there was nothing like the '49 blizzard."

Warren Livestock Company General Manager, Fred Warren, helplessly witnessed the devastation on the sheep and cattle of his ranch. He mourned the loss of the human lives as well. Just five months later the ranch hands, foremen, and superintendents mourned again when Fred suffered a heart attack and died while riding his horse on Soapstone Prairie near Brannigan Springs. According to local rancher and son of a WLSC ranch hand Keith Roman, "It took them days to find his body." Fred was buried near his father, Francis Warren, at the family plot in Lakeview Cemetery in Cheyenne, Wyoming.

Upon Fred Warren's death, his son Francis took over operations and ran it for several years. But the faithful shepherders which were symbolic of the halcyon days of the Warren Livestock Company were hard to come by and overhead costs were high. As a result, Francis, Jr. decided to sell and the Warren Livestock Company changed hands

to the Etchapare family from Cheyenne. In 1963, the Etchapares sold the land, livestock, and equipment to five grazing associations: Belvoir Ranch, Duck Creek, Meadow Springs, Terry Ranch, and Soapstone Prairie.



Soapstone Prairie homesteader Ray Bear attempting to make a path to a spring for his livestock following the blizzard of 1949; *courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton*

The Folsom Grazing Association (FGA), which currently grazes cattle on an easement on Soapstone Prairie, is the successor of the Soapstone Prairie Grazing Association. FGA's president Willie Altenburg adds his perspective about the various grazing associations and the WLSC in general, "...each of those units then, when Warren decided to sell, became a grazing association. They took the ideas and they (created) these units when (Francis) Warren was going to sell. One became Duck Creek, one became Soapstone, and one became the Terry. They just sold them off. So the Warren (Livestock Company) became the precursor, became the grazing association concept. The Warren Livestock Company is the history of northern Colorado as far as grazing associations are concerned" (Martin 2009, 38).

When visiting Soapstone Prairie today, amid the serenity and quiet that this location offers, it's hard to imagine that from the turn of the 20th century to 1963 the tan canvass of buffalo grass and blue grama we see today was a rolling mass of woolly white and sorrel followed by the whoops and hollers of sheepherders and cowboys. Today recreationists at Soapstone Prairie are able to ride and hike the same trails these cowboys and herders used as part of the Warren Livestock Company's "vast empire."

*As they enter the world of make believe, may respect and admiration be shown these great men who settled the West. Their memory lingers on and shall never be forgotten.*

—Dave Cook, Warren Livestock Company foreman,  
*The Way It Was*

## *Railroads and Stagecoaches*

At Soapstone Prairie Natural Area, trails that visitors use for recreation today were once part of two early communication and transportation systems replete with tales of the old west: the stagecoach and the railroad.

The Wells Fargo Stagecoach carried passengers through the hills of the Pronghorn Trail towards Cheyenne, Wyoming in the 1860s. The route is still embedded in the topography of the prairie. Remnants of the Colorado Central railroad grade can be seen by visitors on the Plover Trail where the train snaked through Soapstone Prairie every late afternoon from 1877 to 1882. Hikers and cyclists on the Mahogany and Canyon trails traverse through land that once was the hideout of two stagecoach thieves.

Both the Wells Fargo Stagecoach and the Colorado Central Railroad are important elements of Soapstone Prairie's extraordinary past. Stagecoaches aided in the development of newly settled regions in the western frontier after the Civil War. The Wells Fargo Stagecoach line was an integral link between the supply station in Laporte, Colorado and the increasingly commercial and political nucleus of Cheyenne. Stage drivers were required to be calm under pressure, not only because they were responsible for travelers and their luggage, but because they needed to be able to manage a six-horse team through rough terrain in all weather conditions including blinding blizzards, lightning storms, wind, and punishing summer heat. The stagecoaches or "fire boxes" as the Native Americans called them, fell victim to occasional holdups by masked thieves in this remote area. The Wells Fargo line was the largest stagecoach empire in the world and carried people, money, and mail.

The Wells Fargo Stagecoach through Soapstone Prairie discontinued operating in 1870 after the final development of the Union Pacific Railroad and the building of a connecting station in Cheyenne. After seven years, commercial travel through Soapstone Prairie ceased and travelers needed to use their own resources to get from Fort Collins or Laporte to Cheyenne. Most commonly, travelers used either freight wagons or buckboards. The drivers used the established stagecoach route or the best access possible, depending on weather or other contingencies.



The Steamboat Buttes today are located approximately fifteen miles west of Soapstone Prairie. This photo of a “Stage near Steamboat Buttes” was made by traveling photographer Arundel C. Hull in 1867; *courtesy the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery*

Six years after the last commercial stage rolled through Soapstone Prairie, William A. H. Loveland, a Golden, Colorado merchant and railroad entrepreneur, hired a surveying crew under the command of Captain Edward Berthoud to scout a passable rail route through Soapstone Prairie. With the aid of hundreds of men hired as track gangs, the Colorado Central Railroad made its first run through Soapstone Prairie just one year later on September 26, 1877. The Colorado Central generally followed the same route the Wells Fargo Stagecoach utilized. The surrounding communities could again enjoy commercial travel with stations located at Cheyenne and Bristol Station which was located at the junction of Rawhide Flats Road (CR15) and Buckeye Road (CR82). The construction of the railroad breathed new life into the communities and brought increased economic and social opportunities. Farmers and ranchers could now easily send their flour, produce, and livestock to markets. Tourists travelling by rail increased revenue, and families could visit relatives quickly and easily, previously an arduous task by coach or buckboard.

The Colorado Central Railroad thundered through the hills of Soapstone Prairie every late afternoon for five years until 1882. Commercial service of the Colorado Central ceased in favor of the newly constructed Greeley, Salt Lake, and Pacific Railroad which ran a more level route and therefore could carry more cars, freight, and passengers. The Colorado and Central rails were removed in 1890 and the era of commercial travel in Soapstone Prairie came to a close forever.

### **The Stagecoach Era of 1866-1870**

Soapstone Prairie was the backdrop of enormous stagecoach activity in the 1860s. Stagecoach lines carried mail, money, tourists, railroad workers, and visiting VIPs who



wished to tour the area. When he was nominated for president in 1868, General Ulysses Simpson Grant toured Colorado with fellow Civil War general and friend, Phillip Sheridan. Both rode the Wells Fargo stagecoach from Boulder to Laporte. From Laporte, the stage took them through Soapstone Prairie via Park Station (south of Taft Hill Road and CR 70), to Round Butte (approximately three miles southeast of the Entrance Gatehouse), Jack Springs Station (east of the Pronghorn and Plover trail junctions) and finally Spotswood Station (on the Plover Trail in the northeast section of the natural area) before turning northeast toward Cheyenne. Stage stations were positioned ten to twelve miles apart as this was generally as far as a team of horses could travel before needing water and rest. Round Butte and Spotswood stations were considered swing stations where horses would be switched out. Neither contained a cantina or overnight amenities for travelers.

From the Lindenmeier Overlook at the north parking lot, visitors can easily view the stagecoach route. Looking southeast, the tallest butte on the landscape is Round Butte. This was the first swing station on Soapstone Prairie. After receiving fresh horses at Round Butte, the coach then traveled northeast toward Jack Springs. The last stretch would take them to the next stage stop, Spotswood Station, which today is located on the northernmost section of the Plover Trail. Recreationists at Soapstone Prairie today will intersect with the 1860s stage line on both the south and north sections of the Plover Trail.

Spotswood Station is named after station master Robert J. Spotswood. Spotswood left this station and took over the Virginia Dale station in October 1864, seven months after its first station master, the notorious Jack Slade, was hung by vigilantes in Virginia City, Montana.

The federal government organized several volunteer cavalries, including the 11th Ohio, the 9th Kansas, and the 13th Missouri, to protect travelers and cargo along the Wells Fargo stage route. These volunteer cavalry troops were stationed in Fort Collins. Their primary command, however, was at Fort Laramie located 80 miles west of Cheyenne. The Cavalry used Soapstone Prairie as a link between these two military bases.

On August 12, 1864, Lieutenant Colonel William Oliver Collins along with a company of the 11th Ohio Volunteer Cavalry stopped for several hours on Jack Springs which today is located on the Pronghorn Trail at the “Z” marker. Colonel Collins was on his way from Fort Laramie to the Cache La Poudre Valley to inspect the new military outpost which would come to bear his name.

The stage was active during the free range grazing era of Soapstone Prairie and would have encountered many ranching outfits with thousands of head of livestock.



“Friday, August 12th, left camp about 6 a. m.; road hilly and circuitous, water in one or two small branches, especially on Little Crow creek. A few miles from camp where party with prisoners from Camp Collins had camped last night; met them two or three miles from our camp. Road thence broken, circuitous and latter part muddy to Jack Springs, when stopped for noon; distance about twenty-two miles. Road generally good; no wood or water. Grasshoppers appeared in swarms as we left camp.

Colonel Collins (above left); *courtesy the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery*. Colonel Collins’ report of the conditions at Jack Spring in 1864; *courtesy of Ansel Watrous, History of Larimer County, p 214*



Ranch hands; *courtesy the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery*





Soapstone Prairie homesteading brothers Bert and Ray Bear, were employed as stagecoach drivers for rancher Lady Catherine Moon Lawder from 1910 to approximately 1920. Although the Bear's stagecoach driving days were forty years after the last Wells Fargo stage rolled through Soapstone Prairie, the brothers' experiences would have been very similar to that of the Wells Fargo drivers. The Bear brothers carried cargo, mail, supplies, and an occasional passenger from Fort Collins to Lady Moon's ranch near today's Red Feather Lakes. The Bear homestead was located on the northern section of the Pronghorn Trail.



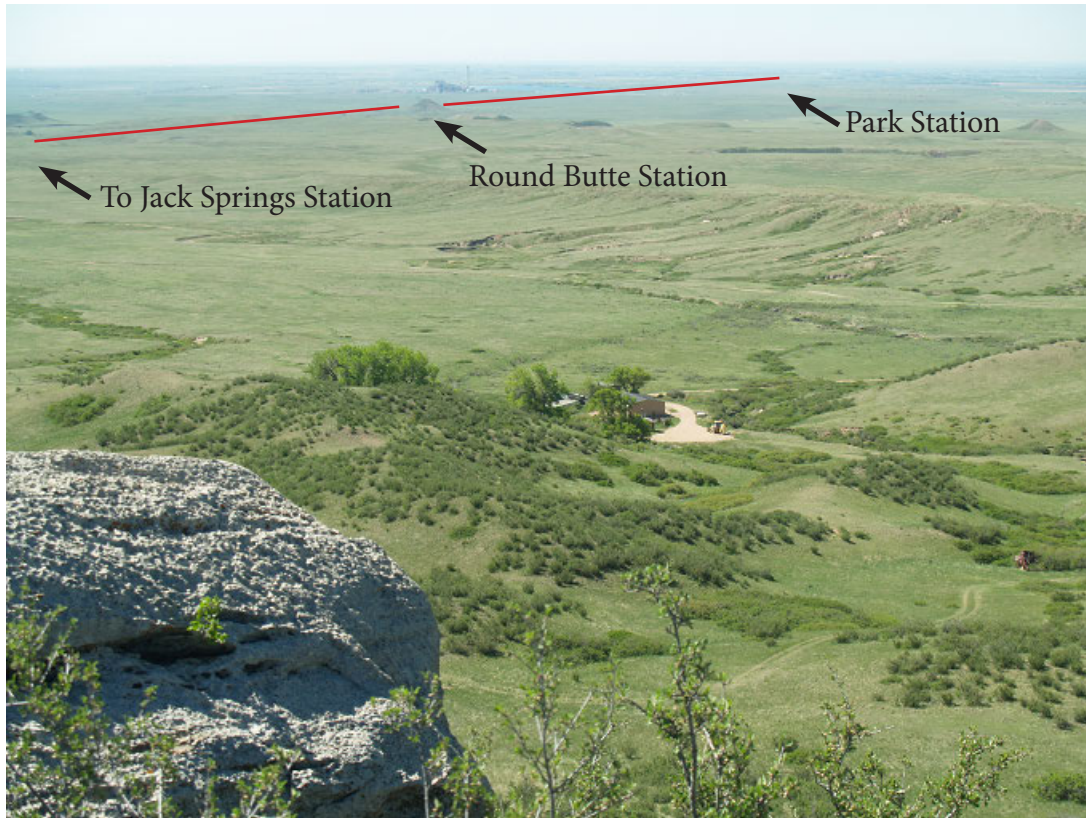
Ray Bear is standing left, Bert Bear is standing right. Lady Moon is the woman to the far right on the wagon; courtesy Cathy Vlasak, Renee Schnorr and Jack Fenton

Stagecoach employees and their guests suffered many hardships as they traveled through Soapstone Prairie, including Native American raids, robbers, and dangerous weather. Newspaper articles recorded some of the treacherous adventures of early stage drivers:

*Rocky Mountain News*, March 1868:

A stage arrived from Cheyenne this noon, having left there at 1 p.m. on the 24th. The driver, Joe Beggs, reports snow 2-10 feet deep between Cheyenne and Big Thompson... Both stages [got] lost between Spotswood and Cheyenne. After being out 24 hours, seven horses and two passengers came into the station. A party started to the rescue, finding the 8th horse but no drivers. The rest are presumed lost.





This photo is taken from the perspective of the stagecoach thieves from their hideout in the hills west of Spotswood Station which today are the Mahogany and Canyon trails. Archaeologist, Dr. Jason Labelle, relates in his Folsom and Lindenmeier discussions that one of the reasons the Paleo-Indian cultures were drawn to this area was because of the vast viewshed it provides. The Folsom people were able to see great distances which allowed them to watch the migration of *Bison antiquus* as well as other ancient bands of nomads approaching the winter camp at Soapstone Prairie; *courtesy Gary Raham*

This peaceful landscape upon which we recreate today appears far removed from the frontier lawlessness of myths and legends. However, northern Colorado was the occasional setting of felonious activity. Newspapers reported robberies on unsuspecting victims in the area:

*Cheyenne Leader*, August 1868:

Near Cheyenne, on Aug. 26, Indians killed and scalped Edmund S. Pratt and drove off 30 horses and mules. The same evening, they drove off all the riding stock from the Wells Fargo & Co.'s lower herd camp, 20 miles below Cheyenne.

*Cheyenne Leader*, December 27, 1869:

Mr. B.E. Hunter tells us of the mail robbery that occurred on the Denver stage road last Sat. night. Though most of the passengers and express traffic take the Denver Pacific RR, still the mails, by contract, use the old stage route via Laporte. On Sat. about 3 a.m. near Spotswood Station, the coach was stopped

by two armed men, who ordered the driver and his passengers to get off. The robbers then drove the coach off, leaving the men to walk back to the station. The mail, horses, and coaches were later found by the road. It has been known for some time that an organized band of outlaws and thieves have headquartered in the hills west of Spotswood Station.

The hills west of Spotswood Station are in the vicinity of the Mahogany and Canyon trails and are accessed from the north parking lot.

*Cheyenne Leader*, dated two days later December 29th, 1869:

#### Capture of the Supposed Mail Robbers

United States Marshal Howe, with Deputy Marshal Boswell and Lieutenant Rogers in command of an escort, arrived last evening with Hudson Trimble and Jack Dunning supposed to be the parties who robbed the Denver mail coach last Sunday morning. They were arrested at a camp in the Black Hills about twenty-five miles from Spotswood Springs. At the camp a mule, the trail of which was followed, was found dead from overriding. Evidence was found at the camp which connected the gang living there with several robberies which have lately taken place in the vicinity of which we shall give particulars at some future time.

The Black Hills are today known as the area around Virginia Dale.

There was a short-lived competitor to the Wells Fargo Stagecoach, the Mason and Ganow Stage Line.

Joseph Mason arrived in the Laporte area from Montreal, Canada in 1860 and began harvesting hay which he sold to the mines in Black Hawk and Central City, Colorado, to maintain their horses. In June 1864, Camp Collins in Laporte was washed out by a summer flood. Mason located a new site for military outpost six miles downriver of the original camp. This new camp would eventually be called Fort Collins. Mason also became the town's first postmaster and one its first sheriffs.

Joseph Mason had an eye for opportunity. Witnessing the success of the Wells Fargo Stagecoach through Soapstone Prairie, Mason recruited the help of a fellow local businessman Sam Ganow and the two created the Mason and Ganow Stage Line. The first stage left Blake Street in Denver at 8:00 a.m. on October 17, 1868, with a promise to their customers that the Mason and Ganow Stage Line would get them to Cheyenne in just 23 hours. This included a stop at Mason's Meadow Springs Station (southeast of Soapstone) ten miles from the Wyoming border. The fee was \$12.00 per customer. The stagecoach war with Wells Fargo was on.



This is the only known photo of Fort Collins founder Joseph Mason (above left). Mason Street in Fort Collins is named after him. Mason died at the age of 41 on February 11, 1881 due to a head injury from being kicked by one of his colts. Captain Asaph Allen (above right); *courtesy the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery*



Advertisement in the Denver Daily Gazette for the Mason and Ganow Stage Line dated April 3, 1869. The ad hypes a four-horse Concord hack as shown here. The Concord could fit six people in the interior, while a dozen or more would pile themselves on the top along with the luggage. Layers of bull hide straps in the under carriage provided suspension which gave the Concord a rocking motion and prompted Mark Twain to call it "an imposing cradle on wheels" (Fargo n.d.); *courtesy of the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery*

**New Stage Line,**  
**DENVER TO CHEYENNE**  
**Mason & Ganows'**  
*New and Splendid Line*  
**OF**  
**Four Horse Concord Hacks**  
**CARRYING THE U. S. MAILS,**  
*Are now running between*  
**Denver & Cheyenne,**  
**MAKING DAILY TRIPS IN**  
*Eighteen Hours.*  
 Coaches leave Denver at 8 o'clock, a. m.; daily  
 Arrive in Cheyenne at 10 a. m. daily.  
 For particulars apply to  
**A. H. Patterson, Ag't.**  
**Office C. A. Cook & Co's Bank, Blake st.**  
**J. L. GANOW, Gen'l Supt.**  
 oct23tf

Because of its generous springs and rich soil, the adjacent Meadow Springs has been the location of haying operations dating back to the 1860s. Joseph Mason and his partner, a 9th Kansas Volunteer Cavalry Officer, Captain Asaph Allen, employed over a dozen men at the Meadow Springs site to put up hay for the miners in Central City in 1868. This operation was overseen by Mason's older brother Augustine. A Mason and Ganow stage station was also located at this site. Just a month after the initial start-up of the Mason and Ganow Stage Line on November 25, 1868, the Rocky Mountain News reported on the rivalry between the two competitors. Wells Fargo had already established the necessary capital to run the stage and could afford a little drop in fare to dust the Mason and Ganow Stage off the Soapstone trail.

*Wells Fargo & Co. put down the fare to Cheyenne this morning to \$3. Mason and Ganow put down the fare tomorrow to \$2.50. The contest is becoming interesting. Public sympathy will be with the underdog.*

However, by April of 1869, unable to compete, the Mason and Ganow Stage Line ceased operation. Captain Allen disappeared at a train station in Baltimore, Maryland in 1869. Mason died an untimely death just twelve years later.

With the advent of the railroads, the stagecoach had become obsolete and was discontinued in 1870.

## **The Colorado Central Railroad**

In 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Pacific Railway Act. The Act provided Federal support for the building of the first transcontinental railroad stretching from the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean. Along with the Homestead Act that same year and the Colorado gold rush, many people moved west and settled in the new Colorado Territory. One of these was Mexican-American War veteran and wagon master, William Austin Hamilton Loveland. Loveland came to the Central City area following the tales of gold nuggets in the hills of Colorado. Loveland was an ambitious man who built the first brick store front in the town of Golden, Colorado in 1863 to house his mercantile business, the Loveland Block. This building is the oldest existing commercial brick structure in Colorado.

With the establishment of a railway station in Cheyenne in 1868 along the transcontinental rail route another "rush" took place on the Colorado prairies— to build a railroad to connect with this depot. The race was on between new state governor John Evans in Denver and Golden businessman William A. H. Loveland. Evans' Denver Pacific Railroad was completed in June of 1870 and ran directly from Cheyenne to Denver through Greeley. Optimistic that he would make Golden the hub of the railroad industry in Colorado, Loveland forged on with his Colorado Central Railroad line which already was moving settlers, miners, and VIPs of the gold and silver industry through the hills of Black Hawk and Central City.



Loveland began construction on the route from Cheyenne to Golden in 1876 and completed it in a record time of just one year. On September 26, 1877, the first Colorado Central train pulled out of Cheyenne headed for Fort Collins with a car full of passengers and a load of grain for town founder Joe Mason. This historic locomotive made its first run straight through Soapstone Prairie.

Captain Edward Louis Henri Berthoud, a Swiss native, also played a pivotal role in the development of the Colorado Central Railroad. A civil engineer by trade, Berthoud was a decorated Civil War veteran with the 2nd Colorado Volunteer Infantry who had a passion for surveying wagon roads and rail lines. Hired by W. A. H. Loveland to survey the line from Longmont to Cheyenne, Berthoud spent many weeks on Soapstone Prairie with his crew in the spring of 1876 canvassing and recording the landscape for a passable route for the rail. When the grading of the rail bed began, crew members were on hand to make certain the line was laid exactly to Berthoud's orders.

Once the line was surveyed and graded, crews began laying the rail lines. The first spike was driven on July 27, 1877 in Hazard, Wyoming, located six miles west of Cheyenne. The gangs then worked from north to south through Soapstone Prairie. The 350 to 400 men and 200 teams of mules and horses hired were a mix of track gangs from Golden, drifters looking for work, professionals following the railroad circuit, and possibly a handful of Japanese laborers.



Colorado Central Railroad developer, William Loveland; *courtesy of the Tom Noel collection*



Colorado Central Railroad stock certificate for 100 shares dated April 8, 1869; *courtesy of Ken Jessen.*

Each crew had a specific job: four men laid the ties, four laid the rail, and two drove the spikes. The men who handled the spike mallets were called “specialists” because it took tremendous skill, stamina, and strength to hit the head of a spike continuously throughout the day. Specialists generally received more pay than the other employees. While the track gangs worked, a locomotive came behind them carrying the equipment (Jessen 2012).

Author and historian Ken Jessen, who visited Soapstone Prairie in August 2012 to study the Colorado Central Railroad route through Soapstone Prairie, provided this sequence for constructing early railroads:

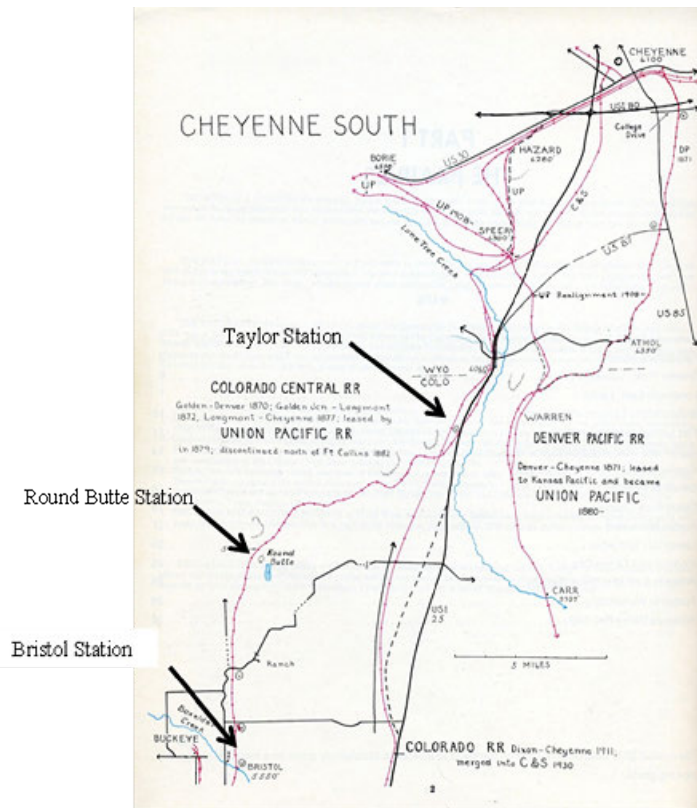
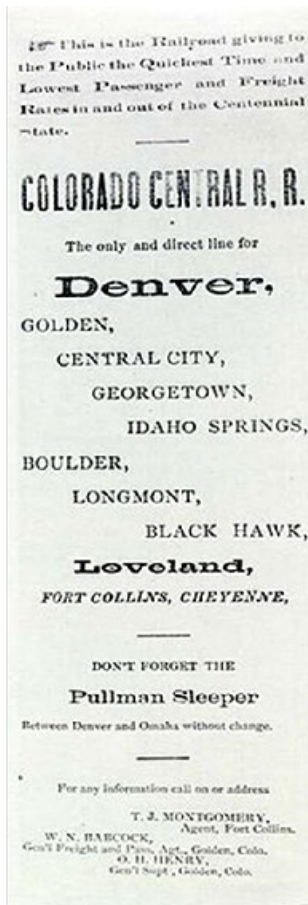
1. Complete a line survey with maximum grade (called ruling grade).
  2. Grading camps were set up at intervals along the survey.
  3. Men with shovels and horse-drawn equipment were used for the work. The most time-consuming part was the trestles.
  4. Track materials were carried on flat cars ahead of the locomotive. Cars were pushed to the ever-progressing end of the track.
  5. Ties were placed on the grade at even intervals, spikes were distributed, rails were placed on ties, and the rails were then joined to the section and spiked into place. The process was repeated as cars were pushed forward over the new track.
  6. Native soil was placed between the ties for ballast.
- (Jessen 2012, 5)

Jessen adds, “Iron spikes, pine ties fashioned from trees, and rail that may have come from the transcontinental line were used in the construction.”

The track gangs often worked 10-12-hour days and were paid \$ 4.25 per day. At the time, this was a great incentive as miners during the same era received only \$1.25 to \$1.50 per a day. A tin mug of beer cost 25 cents. However, even with the lure of the prostitutes (also called “soiled doves”) who followed the rail workers and the liquor and gambling, the working conditions were tough and turnover was frequent.

Railroad camps were spaced about every 15 miles. After a portion of rail was laid and the crew was ready to head to the next location, all the equipment and amenities were loaded up on the locomotive and moved to the next grading site. It was a rough, dirty environment and the term “hell on wheels” was coined. For several weeks in the summer of 1877 the prairie of Soapstone would be lit each evening by several hundred campfires of the employees of the Colorado Central Railroad. From a distance, a visitor might hear a fiddle tune, a laugh from a Cheyenne parlor girl or possibly the sounds of a fist fight coming from the camps.

The crews laid about two miles of track per day and by the first week of September they had reached the Cache La Poudre River near Fort Collins.



Colorado Central Railroad advertisement (above left) from the 1878-1880 Fort Collins Courier; *courtesy of Fort Collins Museum of Discovery*. Colorado Central Railroad route from Cheyenne, WY to Bristol Station (above right); *courtesy of Robert Ormes and Ken Jessen*

Jessen adds, “The trestle across the Cache la Poudre was under construction by the first part of August and by September 14 miles of rail had been laid south of Hazard. Work on the four main trestles was done simultaneously at Box Elder Creek, Cache la Poudre, Big Thompson, and Little Thompson rivers. Excitement rose in Fort Collins in early September when smoke from a locomotive could be seen in the distance. In the meantime, Fort Collins city fathers granted the Colorado Central a right-of-way down the center of Mason Avenue and provided the railroad land for the depot and yards. The rails reached Fort Collins on September 23 and on September 26 the first revenue train ran from Hazard south to Fort Collins (Jessen, *Colorado Central-North of Fort Collins* 2012, 3).

Passengers on the Colorado Central Railroad could disembark at two depots south of Cheyenne and on or near Soapstone Prairie: Taylor Station, which today is on Meadow Springs property, and Round Butte, located three miles south east of the Entrance Gatehouse. The route then ran west of Round Butte and south towards Bristol Station which today is at the corner of Buckeye Road (CR82) and Rawhide Flats Road (CR15).

In *Fort Collins Yesterday*, Evadene Swanson recounts the experience of a young future newspaper editor while riding the Colorado Central Railroad:

Ansel Watrous, a young carpenter arrived in Fort Collins in late December 1877, having come by train from Wisconsin to Cheyenne. The Colorado Central Railroad to Denver had an engine tender, baggage car, and one coach. The passengers were all men, mostly stock growers or traveling salesmen. W. B. Miner and Hugh Barton, another sheep raiser, got off at Bristol Station to go to their ranches. Between that stop and the bluff north of Fort Collins there was no house, cabin, or tree. Lights in three homes twinkled as Watrous approached.

The Colorado Central Railroad operated on Soapstone Prairie for only five years. By 1882 it was abandoned in favor of the Greeley, Salt Lake, and Pacific Railroad which took a more level route to Cheyenne and Denver and therefore could carry more passengers and freight. The tracks of the Colorado Central Railroad were pulled up in 1890 and recycled. Remnants of this old railroad bed can still be seen from Rawhide Flats Road snaking its way through the prairie.



Colorado Central Railroad, 1878; *courtesy of Fort Collins Museum of Discovery*



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## *Author Biography*

Suzy Riding learned the connection between culture and the landscape early in her life. She was raised on a working cattle ranch near the Skull Valley Goshute Indian reservation in Tooele, Utah. She gained a deep appreciation for history through stories about the people and the land as told by her ancestors. In 1990, Suzy enrolled at Colorado State University in pursuit of a Forestry degree, however, a writing course ignited the storyteller in her and she graduated with a B.A. in Technical Journalism/Television Broadcast.

Suzy Riding worked for the City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Department from April 2009 to April 2017 as the gate attendant at Soapstone Prairie Natural Area. She greeted visitors, provided cultural and natural history programs, produced a Soapstone Prairie quarterly newsletter, and was the face of Soapstone Prairie Natural Area for eight years. She extensively researched the pioneering history of this area and its surrounds.

Suzy can often be seen in Old Town Fort Collins doing what she loves most—providing historical tours for visitors. Suzy lives in Fort Collins and is the proud mother of three children, Chandra, Gabriel, and Elizabeth, all residing in Colorado.

