



*Honoring Wyoming's 100-year-old farms and ranches*

## **2013 WYOMING CENTENNIAL FARM AND RANCH YEARBOOK**



# **ARTS. PARKS. HISTORY.**

Wyoming State Parks & Cultural Resources



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## Office of the Governor

Dear Centennial Farm and Ranch Award Recipient,

Congratulations on 100 years or more of family ownership and operation. With your selection this year, you join a distinguished group of families honored since the Wyoming Centennial Farm and Ranch Program was re-established in 2006. Thank you for your long-term commitment to our state, your stewardship of the land, and your dedication to Wyoming agriculture.

Your family is part of Wyoming's history – past, present and future. You provide not only food for the nation but also open spaces, wildlife habitat, and idyllic surroundings. You secure Wyoming's western heritage. We call our state "Forever West" and you make that possible.

Agriculture is Wyoming's third largest industry – a billion dollar a year business. Besides that, Wyoming agriculture is intimately connected with our #1 and #2 industries – energy and tourism, respectively. Energy companies, farmers and ranchers have a long association, and all contribute to the relationship. Tourism benefits from Wyoming farms and ranches because millions of people travel around our state to see the beauty you have helped preserve. This is a long way of saying that what you do and keep doing through the generations is vitally important to our state – it's about agricultural production and so much more.

I am very pleased to recognize you. I wish you continued success and another great century to come!

Sincerely,



Matthew H. Mead  
Governor





# The Child Ranch, 1909

## The Child Family, Laramie County

As told through excerpts from a letter written by Mrs. Charles Child (great-great grandmother of Mark Child) in 1956

**M**y parents came to Nebraska in a covered wagon – owned a cook stove and two or three dollars in money. First they lived in a sod house. They bought and paid for a small farm. When I was thirteen years old we moved about 14 miles (quite a distance then) to the neighborhood where Grandpa (Charles Child) and I first met. After we married we lived in that same neighborhood until we came to Wyoming.

Many years had passed since the pioneering of our forefathers and Nebraska plains were spotted with nice farm homes, very close to each other, compared to Wyoming prairies. Green fields of corn and other grains, gardens and flowers during wet seasons, without the struggle we always had to make things grow in Wyoming.

After Grandpa and I were married, the first place we lived in Nebraska was close enough I could take the old-fashioned baby carriage and put the kiddies in it and walk the short distance to their grandparents or to several close neighbors, so the country life was not lonely there.

There came a time when the men decided we should go West and homestead in order that we might own our own home. Nebraska no longer furnished opportunities for the young men who wished to farm or raise stock. We had loved our present home with all our friends and family surroundings and I had thought I could hardly survive in a strange place. But since it seemed best to move, I made up my mind that wherever Grandpa decided to move, I would be satisfied and make the best of it.

Uncle Glen and Aunt Alice (Marble) were newly married when we moved, but they were not married yet when Uncle Glen and Grandpa first came West to look for the location. Wyoming was really a lonely stretch of prairie at the time. No roads, only



Charles & Emma Child with children Delbert, Archie, Lula, & Bert



Charles & Emma with their children



Archie Child with children Wayne & Doris



Archie & Wayne with the plane used to check on cattle



Child Ranch aerial



Thrashing



Wayne Child showing at Laramie County Fair

trails across the prairie, now and then a “squatter” or a homestead shack.

It was 46 years in March (1956) since Grandpa and Uncle Glen left, after loading all of our possessions and livestock (which we had kept after our sale) on wagons to be hauled to the nearest railroad station where it was loaded on a freight train in the little town of Oak. Then from there to Davenport, where they were delayed until the second day before starting the long journey to Archer, Wyoming. Trains must have traveled much slower then for it took several days of tiresome riding in the freight cars with the stock, eating cold food which we had prepared before, knowing there would not be any chance of getting off for hot meals, as the stock had to be looked after.

After arriving in Archer, where they did not know one person, either there or in Cheyenne, or in all the new country, came the big task of unloading horses, cattle, chickens in crates, household goods, and provisions for living in a tent on the open prairie. No fence of any kind, or shelter for themselves or stock, until they built it with their own hands and all the lumber and supplies must be hauled from Cheyenne, 12 miles distant; and of course, it all had to be hauled with a team of horses and a lumber wagon.

While in the tent, the men awoke one morning to find a howling blizzard raging. They had one shed or small barn built, so they crowded all the horses, cattle, and chickens inside then made their way to the Goodman home, which now is Archie’s ranch



and is where Wayne now lives. The Goodmans made them welcome, fed and sheltered them for 24 hours until the storm abated.

Building corrals and fences for the stock and a house to live in was a slow process. A trip to Cheyenne meant long, cold hours of riding when you drove horses hitched to wagons and the horses had to walk all the way when those wagons were loaded. Roads were not like the highways we now have. The horse (like a good dog) in those days, was man's best friend. Sometimes a horse would refuse to "pull" and was called "balky", which would really make his driver angry. But a faithful team would strain every muscle, even fall on their knees, trying to start a heavy load.

Grandpa had one team, Queen and Nell, which he especially liked. They were almost like part of the family. They were well matched, only Queen was the prettiest one and perfect in behavior. Grandpa used them everywhere, especially in Nebraska to haul water for the engine when they threshed. There were others we hated to see go when we had our sale, but none were like Queen and Nell. We, of course, brought them to Wyoming.

In the early days, before we had the land plowed to raise crops and money had run out, it really made Grandpa feel bad to have to turn the horses out to "rough it", and only have the short, dry grass to eat especially after a hard day of work. It was a sad ending though, for old faithful Queen and Nell and sad memories for us. We needed another milk cow, our neighbor needed a horse, so Grandpa finally traded him Nell, as we had other horses we could use. During one cold winter storm, Queen drifted with the storm down east, she had grown old and weak. She got down and couldn't get up, Mr. Thompson killed her in mercy and put her out of her misery. It was no one's fault.

When Grandpa left Nebraska, I planned to join him in a very short time, or as soon as they had a house built, but Aunt Ethel's boyfriend "brought" us the measles, Lulu and Bert took them, so we waited until Aunt Alice's school term was finished, then all came together. It was quite a happy reunion for us, but Wyoming seemed so far from the old home and



Thrashing crew



5-year-old Gary with 3-year-old Mark during thrashing, 1956



10-year-old Gary with John Deere tractor, 1961

our folks worried a great deal about us. Of course, they were lonesome for us, too.

A doctor could hardly be persuaded to come so far out in the county and often the “dry farmers” had no money to pay them, so we got along without medical help, although it was often needed. We had only been in Wyoming a few weeks when Delbert was born – no doctor – only Mrs. Long was there. Grandpa did the housework for our family of six, hauled water a distance for ourselves and the animals, and cared for me and the new baby. One of Mrs. Long’s daughters gave us a lift for a day or so, and Aunt Alice and Uncle Glen helped out as they could but they were busy, too, and only kids themselves.

Archie was only seven years old and often had to walk many miles looking for cattle as they would go far away from home, they were not fenced in yet. I think they must have sometimes felt homesick, too, as they would often go back east near Archer where they had been unloaded from the train. Sometimes when the storms came they would drift with the storm and at those times the men might have to ride two or three days hunting for them and worrying for fear they wouldn’t find them at all. There were herds of range cattle and “broncs” as the roaming horses were called.

The larger cattle ranchers were far apart and larger sheep owners lived in the towns, or at least not on the prairie; but hired sheep herders camped in certain localities and cared for the sheep. What a lonely life they led, seeing almost no one for months, then when pay day came, they say they often came to town, only to get drunk and lose all their money. Not all were that way, though. There was a little Scotch sheep herder that used to come to our place, or near enough to visit with Archie when he was a small boy. He, I suppose, felt sorry for us, knowing we were having quite a struggle to make a living. He sometimes would bring us part of a sheep (or mutton) when he butchered for himself, as they were allowed to do.

Many of the big stockmen resented the coming of the settlers in to their free range land and were not at all friendly to the homesteaders or “dry farmers”

as they called us. The Iowa Land and Livestock Company owned what was called the Bell Ranch, the place your Uncle Delbert owns now. Mr. Bell lived in Cheyenne and hired help to run the ranch. He and most of his hired help were always very kind to us.

Archie liked to visit the sheep herders. One time he helped move a band of sheep to what was called “seven mile”, which I suppose, was a distance of seven miles from the ranch south of us. They sort of promised to pay him and the herder gave him an old watch. But I still can see him, such a little boy, standing in front of Mr. Bell, the prominent rancher, and boss of the Bell ranch, looking up in Mr. Bell’s face and asking for his pay. I think Mr. Bell gave him something like fifty cents. We expected so much of Archie because he was the oldest. Parent and children often walked several miles in those days when feed was scarce for the horses and cattle, because the saddle horses were often grazing several miles away.

They built the little red schoolhouse for the settlers. This school house still stands on one corner of Archie’s ranch. It was there our children went through the eight grades, and Delbert saw also two or three others from the second generation that went there. Our children often faced the cold Northwest wind, walking the mile and a half to school.

In the early days, Christmas was very different from now. The only Christmas tree in the neighborhood would be a little one at the school house. I recall one lady saying “It takes so little to please a child.” As time went on, we were able to do more for the children and ourselves, but never as much as people do now. I think they were as happy and contented as now, maybe more so. We drove the horses and buggy several miles to attend Sunday School, first in private homes, then later the Baptist people built the little church at Durham.

When Delbert was yet a baby, we had a little Fourth of July picnic at the school house, even though there were no trees near. Mr. and Mrs. Bell came along in their car and he took several of us for our first auto rides, didn’t get to make the rounds as their little boy grew tired and wanted to go. Later on your



Grandpa bought a Ford roadster, and didn't tell the rest of us for some time that he had contracted for it. My! When he did, you can just imagine the thrill we had! It was the first car in our neighborhood. Grandpa had the back changed, put on a different back like a delivery car, or "pick up" as we call them now.

For 17 years he hauled butter, eggs, buttermilk, cottage cheese, dressed chickens, tame rabbits, and potatoes to our customers. We didn't peddle, but delivered, after Aunt Ethel and I started the business while Grandpa was back in Nebraska helping thresh to earn a little money for us to winter on. Thompson's told us how anxious the town people were for those things fresh from the farm. The big ranchers didn't even milk cows for their own use at that time, so they told us. Some very prominent people ate our butter and eggs for several years, and seemed to feel pretty badly when we finally quit delivering.

We had to get up and out to the barn around four or five o'clock mornings when those weekly trips to town had to be made. For several years before we got the Ford, those trips had to be made with the team of horses and the wagon or "spring" wagon, or in the winter sometimes a bob-sled was used. When those trips to town had to be made, it took one or two days work before, turning the big barrel churn by hand, draining and washing the butter, salting it, working it with the wooden paddle by hand, packing great jars for a few hours, then reworking it and molding by hand one pound cakes in a wooden butter mold, then wrapping in butter paper, which had to be stamped with our names and address. We had a little hand stamping outfit and ink pad which we used to stamp the paper before the butter was wrapped. Some years we would sell nearly 2000 pound of butter.

After getting to Cheyenne, there would be two hours or more of delivering, then the horses to be fed and dinner to be eaten. All the shopping for a family of six, and sometimes other business to be taken care of, then the long ride home and chores again – unless those at home might have most of them done. We used kerosene lamps, did not even have an ice box and never even heard of



Archie & Beulah Child's 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary photo



Randy Child, early 1960s



Stacy (Child) Broda at Laramie County Fair, late 1990s

refrigerators as we have today. A kerosene stove for cooking would be considered quite a luxury.

As I look back, I think how hard Grandpa worked in those days, establishing a home, planning for the future, raising the family, also helping to establish a community as well. He dug post holes and set posts over miles of those rocky hills, walking several miles to and from the work. Then, of course, after the posts were set, he had to take a team and

wagon to stretch the wire. He built fences on the homestead and on the Bell ranch, also on the land we bought. As the boys grew older, they too did their share of the work. Repairing fences on a ranch is a never ending job, even to this day.

Because many of the homesteaders came from different walks of life than farming and stock-raising, Grandpa was often called upon to help them. In fact, neighbors often helped each other, either exchanging work or just lending a helping hand. Mr. Klopfer had been a barber by trade so he gave many a free hair cut to the men and boys.

Grandpa served 25 years on the school board. Problems were many, as rural schools were scattered over an area of 100 miles or more. Sometimes as many as nine schools, some in very isolated places, had to be looked after. Where there were pupils there must be school supplies and a teacher. Sometimes classes would be held in a home. Grandpa served on the board of the Federal Land Bank, as did Archie in later years. Also on the Consumers Cooperative Association here in Cheyenne for a good many years.



Codey (Child) Stocks and Wayne Child, Laramie County Fair, late 1990s



Child family at Wayne & Glenis Child's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary





Mark, Glenis, Wayne, Randy, & Gary Child



Wayne Child, Mark Child, John Broda

I think I mentioned earlier of having Sunday school in the homes in the very early days. Later the Baptist people built a little church in Durham, about six miles from where Delbert now lives. Sometimes our Sunday school thrived quite well. We had people of different denominations, but we studied together in harmony most of the time. Other times there would be quite a few children and young people and only two or three of us older people to keep it going. There were times when some of us that were first to arrive would have to hunt up something to build a fire in the cold building before having Sunday school.

In those days many of the settlers gathered coal from the railroad tracks to heat their homes. Some of the train men would roll off great chunks of coal

and people would go along the tracks and pick it up before they could have a fire.

I could scarcely write of old times without paying tribute to Mr. Bell, the good friend of our community, even though he was considered one of the big livestock ranchers. When we came to Wyoming "The Ranch" was owned by the Iowa Land and Livestock Company. They owned large tracts of land, as well as cattle and sheep, and of course saddle horses. Sheep camps were named such as "Lower Camp", "Seven Mile" and such names, according to the location from the home ranch. Although Mr. Bell lived in Cheyenne at that time, he managed the ranch. Always there was hired help, often married couples and we had quite interesting and varied experiences with them.

One bright morning while I was getting breakfast, a young man from the ranch came up for me, saying his wife was sick. To my surprise, I found a newborn baby and not a stitch of clothing ready for it, and no explanation whatsoever. Among neighbors we found baby clothes to care for it.

Later the Iowa Land and Livestock dissolved and Mr. Bell became the owner thereof. Incidentally, I well remember the first tractor I ever saw in operation was a large, clumsy machine, out south of our house. It was owned by the ranch. Over a period of time, Grandpa and all of our boys worked for Mr. Bell. Later he sold quite a bit of land, which was good, as the free range was fast disappearing.

The ranch was sold to a party from Illinois, whose ambition was to be a big rancher. They built a nice home near Durham and hired others to live on the ranch. These people on the ranch were the Burkett family. They became our very good friends, their children growing up with ours, and going back and forth together almost every day.

Time has scattered many of us that were dear friends, and many have passed on. The eastern family couldn't succeed in their ranching enterprise, so the ranch went back to Mr. Bell and eventually Delbert bought it from one of his sons. History starts over again.



Sen. John Barrasso, Gov. Matthew H. Mead, Rep. Cynthia Lummis, Child Family and Sen. Mike Enzi



# The Criss Ranch, 1882

## The Criss Family, Platte County

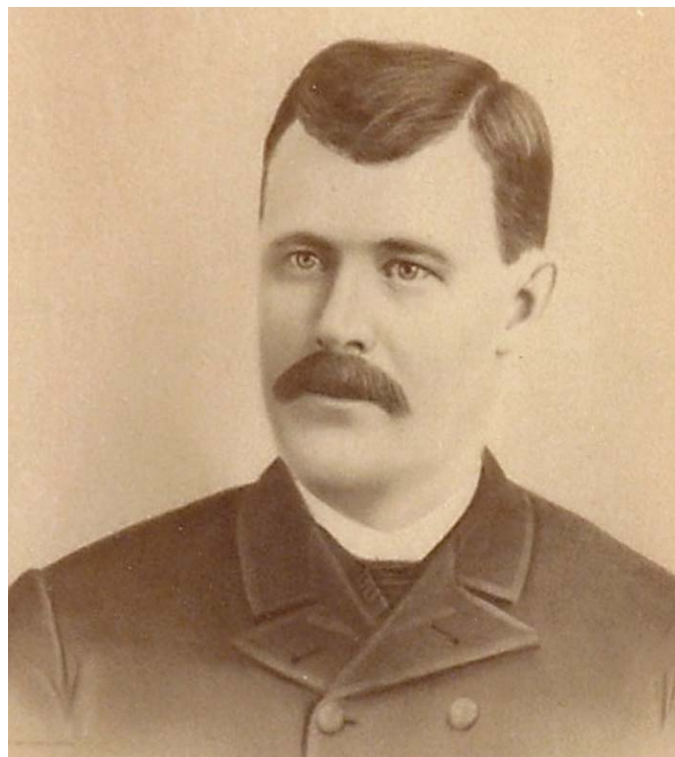
As told from an interview with Bill Criss and in the book North from Texas by James C. Shaw and Footprints on the Frontier by Virginia Cole Trenholm

**E**.M. (Ned) Yates was born in 1859 in southern Texas near the Colorado River. At age 18, in the spring of 1878, Ned started the first of three 1500-mile cattle drives made from Texas to Ogallala, Nebraska. On the first drive, one of the seven cowboys hired drowned while driving the herd across the Colorado River.

In the spring of 1879, Ned made his second drive, trailing 4800 head of cattle from Texas reaching Ogallala September 1<sup>st</sup>. (James C. Shaw also worked on this cattle drive.) From Ogallala, they drove the herd to a ranch located near Fort Robinson, Nebraska. They delivered the cattle to a man named Mr. Getterman who wanted the trail drive cowboys to brand the cattle with his brand. While branding, a yearling hooked his hoof into Ned's shirt, ripping it completely off. The shirt was in shreds. It was the only shirt Ned had and the nearest town to buy a new one was Cheyenne. The men had never heard a man cuss like Ned did. Getterman objected to the cussing because it was a Sunday. Ned then said, "You better put off your branding until tomorrow, for I am liable to swear anytime." Then Getterman replied, "Go ahead with the work and swear all you like, young man."

Ned and four cowboys (including Negro Jim who was the best roper) were chosen to deliver a part of the herd from Ogallala to the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. On the return trip to Ogallala on the first day out, Negro Jim disappeared along with all the grub. Ned and the other three men spent the next two days and nights of the return trip with nothing to eat. They didn't see any game, either, as a recent Indian hunting party had been through the area just days before.

Ned got a job delivering mail from Sidney, Nebraska to the Pine Ridge Reservation. One night



Ed Yates wedding portrait



Anna Yates wedding portrait



In front of Yates homestead (L-R): Ned holds Martha, Anna holding John, Lynn, Myrtle, Will, & Anna, ca 1897. Note Ned wears his spurs.



Criss family ranch

on the route, Indians stole Ned's horses and just about everything else he had. Ned had to walk all the way back to Sidney. When he got there, he immediately loaded up for Texas. (At that time, Alec Swan gave out first-class Union Pacific train tickets to all points in Texas and back for \$65.)

Back in Texas, Ned served with the famous Texas Rangers over the fall and winter.

In the spring of 1880, Ned brought his last cattle herd up from Texas. This time, the end of the trail was in what is now known as Platte County. During



this time, a desperado coming through the area had vowed revenge on Ned, the former Texas Ranger. For Ned's protection, his friends locked Ned up in the basement of the bar in Hartville. This is the bar that is now known as the oldest bar in Wyoming.

Ned took a job in the Uva, Wyoming area working for F.M. Phillips on his ranch located where the Chug Creek flows into the Laramie River.

The present day Criss Ranch began in 1882 when Ned Yates filed for a homestead two miles east of the Phillips ranch. Ned Yates' homestead was in a prime location in a valley next to bluffs along the beautiful Laramie River. There were many massive cottonwood trees that shaded the river in the summer and provided gorgeous autumn scenery. There were deer and wild turkeys to make sure a person didn't starve. It was prime wintering country for cattle and it was not too far to Fort Laramie to the east. On most days, one could ride up the hill and see the spectacular Laramie Peak and the Laramie Range in the distance.

Ned married Anna Dyshok on May 7, 1882. Anna was born in Germany on December 24, 1858. In the summer of 1881, she came to work for the Phillips ranch. (The Phillips's also ran a boarding house for travelers.) During that first summer, Anna saw only four white women: Mrs. Johnny Gordon, Mary Wheeler, Mrs. Pollard, and Mrs. Phillips. After Anna and Ned married, Ned continued working for the Phillips ranch until it was sold, whereby he continued to supplement his income by working for other ranches. Anna and Ned had eight children: William, Lynne, Ola, Anna, Myrtle (born on February 17, 1892), Martha, John, and their last son, Rollie.

Little Ola died when she was four years old (in 1890) from a rattlesnake bite. At the time, Ned was away on one of his many trips made trailing cattle to North Dakota. The closest doctor was at Fort Laramie so Anna tried desperately to save her little daughter. She butchered several chickens using the chicken hearts to draw the poison from little Ola. Ola was buried near the town of Uva at the base of a hill at what is now the intersection of Highway 320 and East Laramie River Road. (Her little stillborn



Ed & Anna Yates in later years

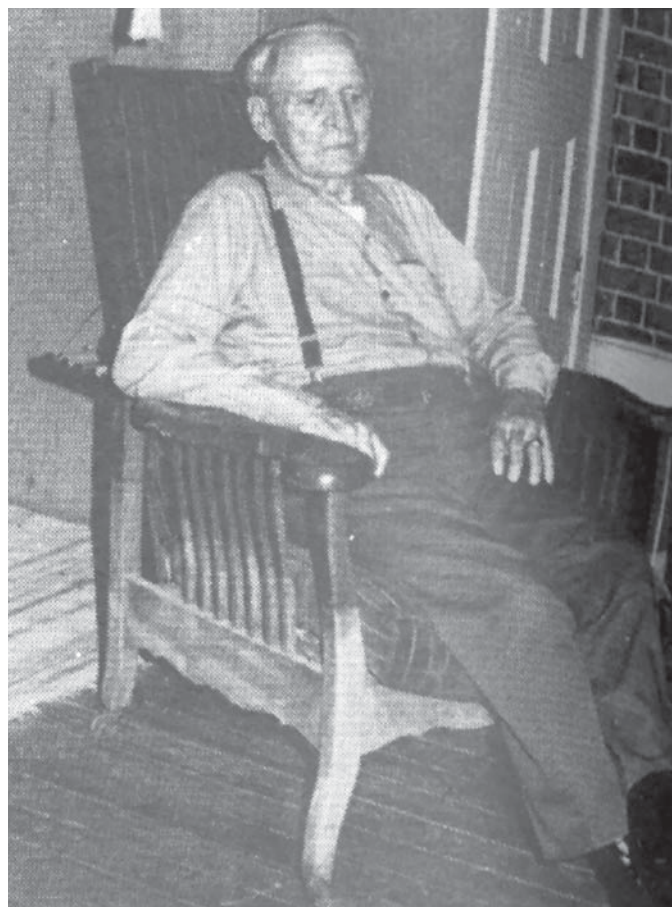
sister was buried next to her in March 1899). Both graves were located directly west of the Jacques LaRamie historical marker on Highway 320. The graves were moved in the 1970s to the Wheatland cemetery.

After Ned came home from the cattle drive, he was working for a nearby cattle ranch when a den of rattlesnakes was discovered. George Mitchell called Ned over, thinking Ned would want to get in on the killing of snakes with his six-shooter. Ned didn't bother with his six-shooter, but immediately stamped, kicked, and ground the hissing rattlers under his boot heels, killing over 200 rattlers that day. Ned died on August 2, 1926 at age 67. Anna died at age 75 in 1934. In 1937, Anna and Ned's





Myrtle Yates Criss with child



Jack Criss in later years



Myrtle Yates (grandmother of Bill Criss), and her 2 sisters



Andrew Lynn Yates

fifth child, Myrtle, and her husband, Jack Criss, began running Myrtle's family ranch (the Ned Yates homestead), presently known as the Criss Ranch. Before her marriage to Jack in 1921, Myrtle homesteaded and ran her own cattle using the Rocking M brand which is the brand the Criss Ranch presently uses.

Jack Criss was born in 1891, coming to the Uva, Wyoming area where he filed a homestead northwest of Uva in 1916. When World War I broke out, he joined the U.S. Army (William Yates also fought in World War I). After an honorable discharge, Jack returned to his homestead and continued working for ranchers and supplementing his income by trapping on the Laramie and North Laramie rivers. Jack made the most money off of the minks he trapped.

Myrtle and Jack had four children: Ralston Jack (Sonny), born in 1922; Annie Ruth in 1923; Wilma in 1926; and Ed in 1931. Sonny Criss received numerous awards for playing football, including receiving all-conference for his junior and senior years playing as a guard. Sonny graduated from Wheatland High School. He played football for the University of Wyoming but his college football career was interrupted by World War II. Sonny enlisted in the navy and served in the Pacific. (His sister, Ruth Criss, also served her country during WWII days as a navy nurse. Sonny returned home to the ranch after his honorable discharge. Sonny and Jack ran the Criss Ranch together for several years.

Sonny married Gwen Elsom in 1958. Gwen was working as a Platte County Home Demonstration Agent when she married Sonny. Gwen also comes from a Wyoming pioneer family, located in the Buffalo area. Gwen graduated from the University of Wyoming in the 1950s. Gwen and Sonny had two children: William R. (Bill) and Becky Ruth. Sonny and Gwen built a house west of the original Yates homestead. Myrtle told them to build the house above the irrigation ditch. (Everyone on the Criss Ranch readily agreed as all were tired of cleaning up the messes that a flooding Laramie River could create. Especially troublesome was the flood in June of 1969 when the Little Reservoir

broke up river and caused enormous problems for all downriver.)

Myrtle died in 1970 at age 78. With the building of the Grayrocks Reservoir in 1973, the original Ned Yates homestead house, which was also the home of Myrtle and Jack, was destroyed. Jack moved into the Senior Citizens Manor in Wheatland. Jack died at age 96 in 1987.

Starting in the late 1970s and into the early 1980s, high interest rates drove many old-time ranches out of business. To help keep the Criss Ranch afloat, Sonny and Gwen both worked at the Laramie River Power Plant. The building of the Laramie River plant destroyed hundreds of beautiful full-grown cottonwood trees. Sonny was hired to supervise a tree planting crew and all the trees around the plant and the Grayrocks Reservoir were planted by Sonny.

Bill Criss graduated from Wheatland High in 1978 and immediately began ranching. Of course, he'd already been ranching for years. Bill implemented new methods to help the ranch survive. With the building of Grayrocks Reservoir, all the irrigated land of the original Yates homestead had been lost so Bill developed pivot irrigation in sagebrush-covered rangeland. Bill found that one advantage to calving on the range instead of along the river was that calves don't drown in sagebrush. Bill switched from Hereford to Angus, almost doubling weaning weights. All original barns and corrals were also lost due to the building of Grayrocks Reservoir. As money would allow, corrals, barns, sheds, and shops have been replaced.

In addition to these problems, Sonny was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. As those familiar with this terrible disease know all too well, there are many difficult years before a diagnosis is made. Sonny spent the last 6-1/2 years of his life in a nursing home before dying in 1999 at age 77. The financial burden of providing nursing home care for Sonny further tested the resources of the Criss Ranch.

Despite these problems, Bill and Gwen continued ranching. In 2005, Gwen received the





Aerial of Criss Ranch

Ranchwoman of the Year award from the Laramie Peak Cattlewomen Organization. Gwen is now in her 80s and lives in town. The Criss Ranch has fought many battles over the years: droughts have been numerous; grasshoppers have tried to destroy what would have been good grass years; diseased cattle herds have had to be destroyed and replaced; blizzards have brought lots of hard work and often dead calves that never had a chance to survive; cold winters with temperatures along the river registering 40 below, along with two feet of snow; frequent floods on the Laramie River brought more hard work with lots of clean up to be done and fences to

be fixed; mosquitos are a force to be dealt with that only people raised on a river truly appreciate; hot summer days with temperatures over 100; low cattle prices; the biting wind that sometimes blows for days in the Wheatland area; and most recently (and the hardest of all battles to be fought), government intrusions. All of these problems make ranching difficult, but a good day on this beautiful ranch and a good calf make it all worthwhile; and so, Bill continues running his ranching operation and trying to do his best to raise good cattle on the place his great-grandfather homesteaded 132 years ago.





Sen. John Barrasso, Gov. Matthew H. Mead, Rep. Cynthia Lummis, Criss Family and Sen. Mike Enzi

# The DesEnfants Ranch, 1911

## The DesEnfants Family, Goshen County



Original homestead, 1915



Charles Edward DesEnfants, 1913

As told by the DesEnfants Family

Charles Edward DesEnfants was born January 3, 1867 at Cairo, Illinois. He was the eldest of sixteen children of Edouard C. and Fannie Slosson DesEnfants. His father, Edouard was born December 14, 1829 in Ghent, Belgium. He came to the United States in 1856 where he met Fannie Slosson on December 24, 1865. They settled in Chicago where they raised their children. Edouard worked as a stonemason in Chicago. Charles left home at an early age to work. He came to Deadwood, South Dakota in 1895. He worked on the police force in Lead, South Dakota from 1902 to 1912. Charles married Annie Meikle on August 8, 1900 at Lead. They were the parents of three sons and one daughter. Annie died of cancer on April 10, 1910. Her wish was for Charles to marry her sister, Maimie Meikle, to help raise her children. Charles and Mary "Maimie" were married on May 7, 1912. They had one son, Edgar. This marriage never worked out and she and son Edgar moved back to



Creighton, Nebraska and Charles raised his four children on the ranch.

Charles homesteaded in the Prairie Center community north of Torrington in 1912. William was the only one to remain on the ranch. He and his wife Nina bought adjoining land and bought the original homestead. Charles died at Torrington on November 6, 1945. William and Nina had two children, Billy and Peggy. Billy grew up on the ranch and then married Bonnie Shane. They bought a ranch a few miles south of the original homestead where they lived and raised their two sons, Doug and Greg. After the death of his parents, Billy bought his sister's share in the ranch and his oldest son, Doug, and his wife, Kim Edwards, started their ranching career there and are still in the ranching business. They raised two sons, Curtis and Cole. Curtis is married and now lives in Longmont, Colorado. Cole has remained a part of the ranch and is the fifth generation to be a part of the ranching operation.



William & Nina DesEnfants, 1980



The ranch today





Sen. John Barrasso, Rep. Cynthia Lummis, Gov. Matthew H. Mead, DesEnfants Family and Sen. Mike Enzi



# The Martens Ranch, 1913

## The Martens Family, Weston County



Original homestead and hay stack, 1920s



Henry P. in front of his ranch blacksmith shop, ca 1925

As told by Myla (Martens) Mills, fourth generation

The Martens first arrived in Weston County in 1912 when Henry Peter Martens came to Upton after hearing word of fine spots to homestead. He had a brother who was ranching in Crook County who said that the time was good to come. With high hopes of launching out on his own after working on his family's farm until he was 30, Henry left the farm in Atkinson, Nebraska. The second oldest boy in a family of eight, he had been helping on the family ranch, but with younger siblings still at home, he decided to make his own way. After a stint of trailing sheep to Sheridan, and then searching for work in Billings, Montana, Henry rode the train back to northeast Wyoming.

Henry was an accomplished blacksmith in Atkinson, a trade which would serve him well to supplement his ranching in the years to come. He came and scouted a place to lay stake. He found an area that had been a desert claim that was abandoned. He was able to make claim in 1913. He homesteaded 320 acres six miles southeast of Upton in Weston County. Henry's brother, Charles Martens and his wife May (Willadson) Martens, convinced her sister



Henry P. Martens standing (middle) in front of his corn



3 Martens siblings (L-R) May, Henry Lee, John (Jack), ca 1924

Clara to come out and work and get reacquainted with Henry. The Willadsons were also from the Atkinson area. The relationship between Henry and Clara Willadson took shape and they got engaged.

Henry, being a wise businessman first and foremost, had Clara file her own claim that neighbored his. She was very fortunate because the government had originally withdrawn this land from homesteading because the surrounding area depended on it for livestock water. But they had turned it loose and



Original Martens family, back Henry Lee, John (Jack), May Oline, front Henry Peter & Clara, ca 1933

Clara made claim. Once they had each made good, or proved up on their claims, they married and moved to Clara's homestead shack. They each got another 320 acres a piece after proving up. This was the start of the Martens Ranch, run by Henry and Clara Martens together from 1914 until around 1948, when they moved to town and turned it over to sons John "Jack" Martens and Henry "Lee" Martens.

Henry and Clara were hard-working and industrious. It didn't hurt that he came with cash in hand from his family in Nebraska for having given 10 years to that ranch. During the Depression of the 1920s, this allowed them to buy out neighbors that had by then given up on the idea of making a living off the land. It happened time and time again. Once people proved up on their homesteads and they owned the land, they were more than happy to sell and leave the area with some cash. Their



ranch grew exponentially during that period of time, acquiring cattle and land.

They raised three children on the ranch. The oldest was May Oline Martens (Fox) who was born in 1916. Then son John “Jack” Willadson Martens was born in 1918. Their youngest, a son named after his father, Henry Lee Martens, was born in 1920. He went by Lee, or H. Lee. During the early, hard years, they managed to get by because they had enough land to graze and more water at their disposal than most. This was because of their location, which was where Beaver Creek and Soda Creek joined. They had a big reservoir there because of a dam they had built.

Henry and Clara had many skills. Henry, an accomplished blacksmith, was also a fine gardener, selling his extra potatoes and corn. He planted more potatoes than his children cared to hoe. Clara made clothing and was one of the first to can in this area. She canned the produce from the garden and made jams from Henry’s famous strawberries. They also milked cows to sell the cream to the creamery in town. She also churned and molded her own butter which she sold. While all lady, Clara was also quite a hand outside on the ranch as well, riding and fencing along with the boys. She one time surprised her neighbor, Mr. Foltz, by wearing bib overalls and riding a horse astride when women only wore dresses and riding skirts. They had a well-stocked root cellar and had their own ice house. Clara had a beautiful yard and flowers. Henry and his sons, Jack and Lee, also had a band; the boys played banjos and Henry played the fiddle. Henry was also one to like the newest, best things; he was said to be the first in Upton to own a Model T Ford.

The three kids, May, Jack, and Lee, were all born at the ranch. The kids attended the Foltz-Martens school. It was a one-room school house that they built on land donated by a neighbor, Jarbo Paulson. The Foltz family and the Martens family lived two miles apart. So they built it between the two, so each family had to walk one mile to school. The kids had to pack their own water and lunch. The school was in operation for six years, from 1924 to 1930, when the Foltz family moved to town and the



The Henry Lee Martens family: Thelma, Judy, James, Lee, 1952



Thelma & Judy Martens helping make hay, ca 1960



Part of corrals (made of pipe) built by H. Lee Martens, X-Ring brand on center gate, ca early 1970s



Lee Martens on right & Steve Boal, in front of new barn Lee had built, 1962



Jim Martens (L) and Lee Martens on Tommy, getting ready to ride



Driving cattle between the home ranch and the Lodgepole out south, ca 1978

school closed. It burned down some time later.

As their father grew older, the brothers, Jack and Lee, leased the ranch and bought out his cattle. Jack built a business in town, the Cowboy Bar, to which most of his time was committed. Lee married a Weston County gal by the name of Thelma Slagle in 1943. Shortly after they married, Lee left for World War II. Upon his return, Lee worked on the ranch and in the bentonite industry. Lee had it in his mind to run the ranch as he saw fit. He approached his father with the idea and, with his father's encouragement and his brother's blessing, he was given one-third of the place and bought the other two-thirds. In 1950, Lee began running the ranch. Lee and Thelma over time acquired more neighboring land. One place they acquired was the Ammerman Place, just east of Upton about three-and-one-half miles. They lived in the old house from 1952 until 1970. This is where they raised their children. With the help of money they made from bentonite mined off the northern part of the ranch, it made paying off the ranch a reality, and they continued to acquire more land.

H. Lee and Thelma had two children. A son, James "Jim" Everett Martens, was born in 1946. A daughter, Judy Lee Martens (Bartels), was born in 1948. Lee and Thelma solely ran the ranch from 1950 until 1980. They built a house in town in 1970 when the highway was relocated and came too close for comfort to their house at the Ammerman place and chopped up the northern edge of the ranch into some odd pieces. By the mid-1970s, both Jim and Judy had each married and moved back to Upton where they started families of their own. Jim and Katherine (Dunn) Martens had two daughters, Megan and Myla Martens. Judy and Donald Bartels had three sons, Clay, Wes, and Joe.

In 1974, both Jim and Judy and spouses went into business with Lee on the ranch. At this point they incorporated and used the name, The X-Ring Ranch. He bought another place 30 miles south of Upton in order to expand the ranch for two families to make it work. In the 1980s, Lee offered the ranch to be split and sold between the two kids. Due to hard times in the banking and agriculture industry in the 1980s, one-half of it went back to



Lee. Meanwhile, Jim was able to maintain his half. James and Kathy (Turner) Martens were able to buy the other half from him as well.

Jim had two daughters, Megan Danielle Martens (Haworth) and Myla Deanne Martens (Mills), from his first marriage. He then married Kathy Turner, who had two children, Jason Turner and Alysha Turner (Engle). Jim and Kathy and the four children began running the ranch from then on. During this time, the one thing that helped them purchase both land and livestock with interest rates so high, was the fact that both worked at the Black Thunder Mine. Jim continued working at the mine for nearly 30 years. Kathy, an RN, eventually became the school nurse in Upton for nearly 30 years.

Since both maintained full-time outside employment, Jim and Kathy added to the size of the ranch by buying neighboring and adjoining pieces of land. Once Jim and Kathy paid off the ranch, it became their desire to pass it on to their children and their fourteen grandchildren. Jim and Kathy ran the ranch from around 1978 until 2013. Over the course of the last 16 years, three of their children have returned to the Weston County area. The oldest of the four, Joseph “Jason” Turner, lives in Upton with his two children, Nolan and Hailey Turner. Alysha Engle and her husband Ryan live in Newcastle with their children, Trenton Engle; Bailey, Triston, Sawyer, and Slade Roberson, and Tate Engle. Megan Martens-Haworth and her husband Malcolm, along with daughter Elise Haworth, live in Spokane, Washington. Currently their youngest daughter, Myla Mills, and her husband have moved back to Upton in order to run the ranch with the help of their five children, Ethan, Chase, Madelynn, Paige, and Olivia Mills. All three families, along with Jim and Kathy, stay active in the bigger events and tasks of the ranch. It isn’t uncommon to see upwards of eight grandkids out moving cows or tagging calves.

There are many interesting and fun facts that weave in and out of the history of the ranch. The ranch has an Indian trail, the one that went from the Crow Reservation to Fort Robinson, Nebraska. It was used in the late 1800s. Along this trail, a couple



The 3 Martens siblings (L-R), John (Jack), Fay Fox (Martens), Henry Lee Martens, ca 1981



3 generations of Martens, 1981. Back (L-R): John, Eliot with Nels, Lee, May, Thelma, Donald Bartels, Judy, Kathy with Myla; seated. Front: Megan, Wes, Clay, Alysha, Jason



Jim & Kathy Martens, ca 1982



James (Jim) Martens, ca 1986



Block cabin H. Lee built on site of his mom's homestead to the exact size of original



Our recently re-sided cabin with new sunroom, it replaced original homestead house and has become the large family's base of operations at the ranch.

of Indian graves were found. Both were exhumed by the University of Wyoming. A fire ring that was used by early native travelers is also still visible on the ranch. In the early days before we had purchased outlying homesteads, there was a murder at one of the homesteads on Beaver Creek. A father-in-law (McCummis) shot his son-in-law (Brock) out by his barns and corrals.

Once Henry P. homesteaded, like any other Nebraskan farmer, he went to farming. The ranch today still bears fields where they had farmed. The wheat, hay, and rye fields, now interspersed with cactus, stick out like sore thumbs in the sea of sage brush. Due to the aridness of the region and drought-filled years, Henry and Lee both gave up on the farming and hay making. Currently, there is no farming. One treasure that our ranch does have is three artesian wells, two developed in the early 1960s, and one in the 1970s. When others suffered during droughts, they were able to develop a pipeline and tank system that runs for several miles. With the development of this water system for the livestock, we have been able to utilize pasture we were never able to use once reservoirs and dams dried up.

In 2004, Lee and Kathy Martens, and Myla Mills, took a drive. Lee drove around the whole ranch and Myla took pictures of all the homesteads that were once on the ranch as it now stands. Myla recorded a written record and photographs and an artifact was collected from each homestead site. That written history is also a treasure to our family. While all the homesteads have now fallen, there are still traces of them if you know where to look.

During Henry P's reign, he ran an assortment of breeds of cattle. Lee, trying to streamline things, tried his hand at Herefords for a long time, eventually ending his reign with a nice set of crossbred yearlings. Jim and Kathy spent time and energy over many years developing a nice herd of artificially inseminated (AI'd) cattle. Our ranch is currently a cow-calf operation. The use of horses is, and has been, a strong part of our tradition. From Clara riding a big bay named Joe, in her bib overalls, to Lee's favorite horse, Blondy, an American saddle horse. Currently, Kathy's passion





Looking towards the corrals & cabin, past 2 dams, 2006



5th generation on shipping day: (L-R) Ethan, Triston, Maddie, Slade, Tate, Hailey, Chase, Trenton, Nolan sitting

for breeding and training her own quarter horses keeps her family well-mounted. The horses are one of our most treasured and used assets.

It is truly an honor to have held the X-Ring Ranch for over one hundred years in the same family. After the original homestead became tattered and worn, Lee built a center-block cabin on the exact site. It is very humbling to walk into that cabin, a twelve-by-twelve-foot space, realizing my grandfather was born on that exact location. It makes you realize how far we have come in one hundred years. We no longer heat stones and take them into bed with us to stay warm through the



Kathy on Fish with Evan behind. Kathy trained Fish, & they competed in ranch horse competitions, ca 2005.

night! There is a strong passion in the Martens family of wanting our kids to know what it is to be part of something bigger than themselves. It is something my great-grandfather started when he ventured even further west and withstood the challenges of Wyoming agriculture. A challenge the next generation wants to take on as well. Some people's kids get excited about the first day of hunting season, or the Super Bowl, but it's fun to see our kids and nieces and nephews get excited about shipping day.





Martens Family after Upton's Fun Days Parade where the family had a float to celebrate their Centennial Ranch, 2014



Sen. John Barrasso, Rep. Cynthia Lummis, Gov. Matthew H. Mead, Martens Family and Sen. Mike Enzi



# The Micheli Ranch, 1901

## The Micheli Family, Uinta County



Sen. John Barrasso, Gov. Matthew H. Mead, Rep. Cynthia Lummis, Micheli Family and Sen. Mike Enzi

# Hillside Farms, 1908

## The Michael Peterson Family, Laramie County



Larson farmhouse near Albin

As told by the Peterson Family

Swedish farmer Peter K. Peterson, born in 1829 in Alfta, Halsingland, was the immigrant farmer who laid the Mike Peterson family's farming foundation in the United States. As many immigrant stories read, the Peterson story takes Peter Peterson across the oceans on a passenger ship to the rich farmland of the midwestern United States. Grandson Fred J. Peterson moved the story westward to the plains of Wyoming.

Peter set out for opportunity in America in 1852 and first settled in Illinois, where in 1858 he married Christiana Nelson, also born in Sweden, who came to the United States in 1853 with her family. Peter and Christiana moved their growing family to central Iowa where son Walter Edward was born in 1868 near Sheldahl, a farming community that straddles the county lines of Polk, Boone, and Story. In 1896, Peter received a homestead patent on 160

acres in Boone County.

Walter Edward Peterson married Teoline (Lena) Auestad on 17 May 1893 in Boone County, Iowa, and his brother, Randolph, married Lena's sister, Elida (Ida) on the same day. From Norway, the Auestad girls had come to America in 1881 with their parents and older sister Belle, who played a major role in how the Petersons got to Wyoming.

In 1897, in Sheldahl, Ingeborg Kristine "Belle" Auestad married Lewis Larson, a Norwegian farmer and furniture and implement dealer. In 1908, Belle and Lewis Larson set off for Laramie County, Wyoming where they homesteaded 160 acres west of present-day Albin. They built a dugout and began their lives on the Wyoming frontier, initially farming with horses and also raising sheep. In 1912, they added another half-section.

In 1913, the Larsons bought from a man named



Rutledge another quarter-section across the road (now Wyoming Highway 216) from their original homestead. They built another south-facing dugout there in the hillside and then built a large livestock barn and shed, still standing and in use today by Hillside Farms.

Belle and Lew had no children. Needing help on the farm, they got it from nephew Fred Peterson, born in 1894 to Walter and Lena. He married Irene Warfel in Des Moines in 1917, and soon after the young couple headed west, first living with Aunt Belle and Uncle Lew in the dugout. When Irene was pregnant with their first child – a son named Bruce Edward, born in 1918 – she took the train back to Iowa to give birth. She repeated this routine when second son Gerald came along in 1926.

In about 1921, Lew and Belle Larson built the two-story frame house that still stands at Hillside Farms. Lewis shipped the lumber by train from Iowa. Highly respected, Lewis was elected county commissioner and was known for his success raising sugar beets without irrigation.

When Lewis Larson died in 1943, Aunt Belle buried him in Iowa but returned to the farm in Albin, where she lived until the late 1940s. Shortly before she died in 1951, Belle returned to Iowa.

Belle Larson left the Larson farm to her siblings, with Fred inheriting his late mother's share. He and the other relatives formed a partnership, with Fred doing the farming and his family moving into the big white house. The 1954 edition of *Historical Encyclopedia of Wyoming* (Thomas S. Chamblin, editor) shows Fred Peterson farming 1,380 acres near Albin, specializing in growing wheat and raising sheep. He used till and wheat rotation methods in his farming.

Fred and Irene's older son, Bruce, married Elizabeth Hammons in 1944 and live in a "little house" down the hill from the big white house. When Bruce and Elizabeth purchased the partnership's farm in 1963, Fred and Irene moved into Cheyenne – and the next generation of Petersons, with children Patricia and Mike, moved into the white house. Fred died in 1968 and Irene in 1976.



Farming in 1919



Dugout, winter 2009



Hillside Farms sign



5th generation Lee Peterson runs the combine, 2012



Bean pulling



Wheat harvest

Bruce and Elizabeth raised livestock and continued with wheat rotation, and also installed irrigation with two center pivots. Bruce carried the mail on a rural route for many years and also drove the Albin school bus.

After finishing high school in 1973, Mike began his own farming operation by custom farming and renting land. In 1977, he purchased Lew and Belle's original 160-acre homestead from his parents and installed pivot irrigation. In 1978, he married Cheryl McCloy from Morse, Texas, and they moved into their own home on the big hillside.

Together, Mike and Cheryl planted windbreaks on the homestead and put the corners into hay. After the death of Mike's parents, he and Cheryl purchased the rest of his parents' farm. They practice no-till for soil and moisture conservation, and planted additional windbreaks for erosion control. With the irrigation systems, they also conserve water usage by using low pressure irrigation and also moisture sensors to prevent overwatering crops.

Incorporated a few years ago as Hillside Farms, the Petersons plant wheat, corn, sunflowers, and millet in a dryland rotation. On irrigated acreage, they plant wheat, corn, sunflowers, millet, dry beans (pinto and great northern), and hay. They own and rent acreage and also do custom farming to supplement their income. Mike, like his father, drives a rural school bus route and also serves on the Laramie County FSA committee.

Mike and Cheryl, members of Albin Baptist Church, raised their children as active participants in farm, church, and community work. Their farm has truly been a family operation, with little hired help other than family members. The kids started out pulling rye from the wheat fields, taking lunches to the field, and caring for the chickens and the home garden. As they got older, they drove the tractor, grain cart, combine, and trucks.

Son Lee Peterson, 22, is the fifth generation of this family pursuing the Wyoming farming legacy, helping his parents work the original Larson homestead land and other farm property as well as





Hillside Farms today



Original barns in use today





Sen. John Barrasso, Gov. Matthew H. Mead, Rep. Cynthia Lummis, Peterson Family and Sen. Mike Enzi

his first piece of land, purchased in 2010. He has remodeled and resides in the big white farmhouse built by Lew and Belle Larson. He is Assistant Fire Chief of Albin's Volunteer Fire Department, completed EMT training in 2013, and also serves as church trustee.

Mike and Cheryl's daughter, Mindy, is married to John Joekel, has three daughters, and lives in Gering, Nebraska, where she runs a small cake-making business. Daughter Lori is married to Brett

Anderson, originally from Burns, has a daughter, and lives in Cheyenne, where she teaches school.

As their grandchildren come along, Cheryl and Mike now relish introducing the next generation to the rewards of hard work and farm life. As they admit, so much is out of the farmer's direct control, but success comes from the blessings of the Good Lord and family, and the support of loyal bankers who stand behind them in good times and bad.



# The Semlek Ranch, 1911

## The Semlek Family, Crook County

Alexander Semlek was born in Tallinn, Estonia on January 22, 1878. He was trained as a blacksmith and finding it hard to find employment, he immigrated to America in 1907 through the port of Philadelphia. He made his way across the country, eventually in Fort Pierre, South Dakota, where he worked on the railroad for three years. During this time, several other Estonians who worked with him explored other areas of the country looking for land to homestead. A group of them came to northeast Wyoming and homesteaded about 18 miles northwest of Moorcroft in the spring of 1910. He first lived in a dugout with another Estonian family and in 1912 he built a 14x20 foot house with squared-off logs and dove-tailed joints. He and a neighbor hauled the logs from some timbered hills about four miles away and they helped each other build their houses. His fiancé, Anna Wilhelmina Saar, was born January 12, 1895 and followed him from Estonia, arriving in Moorcroft on June 13, 1913. They were married the next day, June 14<sup>th</sup>. Five children were born of this union: Hertha on May 8, 1914, Robert on February 2, 1916, Erna on December 12, 1917, William August on September 24, 1919, and Valdemar Frank on June 25, 1923.

To bring in extra money to make ends meet, Alex worked as a shepherd in the winters for different sheep ranchers, mainly the Wrights south of Gillette. He also made tools using their forge during slack times. When he was gone during the winter, Anna was left with the five children and all the ranch chores. She broke the hay out of the stack and put it on a sled with a three-foot high bed. She pulled it back to the barn with a rope that was slung over her shoulder. She then had to water the cattle from a hand dug well, winching up water. All this was accomplished by a woman only 4 feet 10 inches tall and very slight. Summer had backbreaking chores also. Anna raised a big garden of potatoes, turnips, rutabagas, and carrots among many other vegetables. Provisions for the winter included a 100-pound sack of sugar and four to five 50-pound sacks of flour. Twenty-five wooden



Grandpa Semlek



Anna Semlek





Semlek Homestead 1916



Semlek buildings



Semlek sheepwagon



Semlek family & buggy



Semlek family in berry bushes



Shocking grain



boxes of dried peaches, pears, apples, and prunes were stored in the wooden granary on wooden shelves hanging by wires to keep the mice away. The kitchen range burned wood in the winter and cow chips gathered by the kids in the summer. Hogs were the main source of meat for the family along with an occasional chicken. In the summer and fall, everyone picked wild gooseberries, chokecherries, buffalo berries, service berries, and plums in the draws behind the house. The kids would even peddle the wild berries on the streets of Moorcroft. Cattle were raised only for sale, along with turkeys, cream, and eggs. With the proceeds, clothes were ordered from Sears and Montgomery Ward catalogs that included shoes, overshoes, coats, and bib overalls for the boys. Yard goods were ordered for making the girls' clothing since Anna was a seamstress. Feathers were saved from the chicken that were butchered and used to make pillows and feather beds. Laundry was done using a glass washboard. The wash water was heated in wash boilers by melting snow in the winter but water had to be hauled three-quarters of a mile in the summer from a well in the pasture by using a barrel in a horse-drawn wagon since they wanted soft water for the laundry.

Entertainment was also home-grown. The girls cut out the colored figures in Sears and Montgomery Ward catalogs for paper dolls and dressed them up using different dresses, coat, and hats. Music was provided by Alex playing a pump organ. In the summer, the kids played in Alex's wagon box when he replaced it with the hay rack. Mud pies and cakes were made and garnished with weed leaves. The larger leaves even served for dishes. In winter, they slid down the hill behind the house on a homemade sled named "Bucky" that Alex had made. It was rough riding with no way to guide it, therefore the name. At Christmas, stockings were hung for Santa. A wearable garment was a common gift. Sometimes it was Anna's spun and knitted mittens, cap, or scarf. Head cheese and blood sausage were Christmas treats.

Alex plowed his fields of about 60 to 80 acres with machinery pulled by teams of horses. There he raised wheat, oats, corn, and millet for hay. Anna and the children would help shock the grain. Alex



Semlek stair steps



Semlek Model A



Semlek Place 1940



Thrashing



Semlek family

would haul the bundles of wheat and oats with the hayrack close to the house and pitch them from the rack while Anna built the round pointed tall stacks of wheat and oats. The big stacks of shocked grain were built where Alex wanted his straw stacks to be. Most of the time bundles were hauled with the hayrack direct from the field to the threshing machine which required a crew of usually four to six people. Usually someone in the community did all the threshing with two men operating the machines. The first threshing was done with a steam engine and later by a gasoline tractor.

The Estonian community was known as kariaala. There were about ten families on nearby homesteads. Only two of the original homesteader families still live in the community. The children of the homesteaders didn't speak English as everyone they made contact with was Estonian. When the children were old enough to attend school, a local homesteader loaned them his living room for the summer. In the summer of 1921, Alex donated an acre to use for a school and the West End school was built. Since none of the children knew English, their teacher first had to learn to communicate with them. Hertha managed to convey to the teacher that they had some baby kittens so all the children repeated, "The kitty's eyes are shut." Sometime in the fall before snow got too deep, school closed for the year. As they grew older and graduated from eighth grade, the girls worked for their board to attend Campbell County High School and the two boys batched in Moorcroft to attend high school there.

The youngest son, Frank, went only as far as eighth grade. Hertha went on to Normal training and later earned a bachelor's degree in education to become an elementary school teacher. She married George Larsen in 1951 and lived on a local ranch teaching and raising two sets of twins. She passed away at age 98 in 2011. Robert worked as a mail carrier for several years locally until joining the Army in 1940 and serving a career as an Army officer. His first wife, Frances, died in the late 1940s and he married Becky Hawkins in the 1950s and had two children. He died in a car accident in 1971.

Erma went through nurse's training in the late 1930s and married Ken McCaughin, later moving to Montana to raise her three children. William was drafted into the Army in 1942, served in Europe in the infantry, was wounded, and held as a prisoner of war in Germany. After being released at the end of the war, he spent several years in California, marrying Louise Glotzbach from Los Angeles. He owned the ranch for about 50 years and died in 2011 at age 92. Frank worked on the ranch as a young man alongside Alex. He was diagnosed with a brain tumor in 1955, dying in 1960. Anna died in 1949 and Alex in 1960. William returned to the ranch in 1949 to help Frank and his father run the ranch. A separate house was built from the remains of a neighboring homestead after hauling it across five miles of prairie on a primitive road. The house was expanded several times over the next 35 years.

The ranch also expanded over the years, acquiring several pieces of land that was northeast of the original homestead but not contiguous. William and Louise had four children. Jeanne is married, has three children, and lives in Salt Lake City. Jerry and his wife have three children also and live in Henderson, Nevada. Mark and his wife have five children who reside on the eastern part of the ranch about seven miles from Alex's original homestead. Vicki and her husband have one child and have lived in Alex and Anna's house for 25 years. Mark has bought more land nearby adding to the acreage. His son, Toby, and family now live near Mark so that makes five generations of Semleks over 100 years working this ranch.





Alex Semlek house



Bill Semlek house



Semlek swather

During the last 100 years, cattle, sheep, pigs, small grains, hay, and hunting have all contributed to the family income. Hereford cattle was the predominant breed until the early 1970s when the breeding program transitioned to Angus and Angus-Charlois cross feeder cattle. The ranch is currently managed as a commercial Angus/cow/calf/yearling operation with hay produced for livestock feed and for sale.

One theme that runs through the years is that it is hard to make ends meet on a ranch without outside income. Alex worked away from the ranch for six months at a time shepherding. William worked as an oilfield pumper during the late 1950s and 1960s in the nearby oil field. Mark worked for a pipeline company during the 1980s and his wife worked at several jobs. Ranching is a great way of life but not always a great living. Our family is committed to keeping this ranch together and taking it into the next 100 years.



Sen. John Barrasso, Gov. Matthew H. Mead, Rep. Cynthia Lummis, Semlek Family and Sen. Mike Enzi



# The Splittgerber Ranch, 1913

## The Splittgerber Family, Goshen County

Six-year old Hugo Splittgerber immigrated to the United States from Germany with his family in 1881, settling on a farm southwest of Wayne, Nebraska. His father, Wilhelm, purchased land over time and was able to give each of his ten children acreage near the home place.

But in September of 1912, Hugo and his half-brother, Emil, were drawn to homesteading opportunities in eastern Wyoming made possible by the Homestead and Mondell Acts. Until that time, no more than a half-dozen families lived in the area between Jay Em and Van Tassell, Wyoming, just west of the Nebraska border. To receive their patents, homesteaders were required to live on their claims seven months per year for three years, so many did not stay year-round. While Hugo kept his farm in Wayne, he chose to move permanently to his Wyoming homestead. He stayed with the Perry Benshoof family, also from Wayne, while he built his shack, walking more than a mile each way daily to do so. Emil also built a shack on his claim some four miles to the southeast of Hugo's. He also became co-owner with Jim Hill of the Central Garage in Torrington where they sold Maxwell automobiles.

On May 12, 1913, Hugo wrote to his family in eastern Nebraska that he was looking for a team of horses to use to sow barley and oats. Six days later he bought the team for \$300 and began his dry land farming operation. In June, he returned to Wayne to marry Mathea (Matie) Jorgensen, a Danish immigrant who lived some ten miles from his Wayne farm. They honeymooned in Colorado, Utah, and Yellowstone Park before returning to their new home.

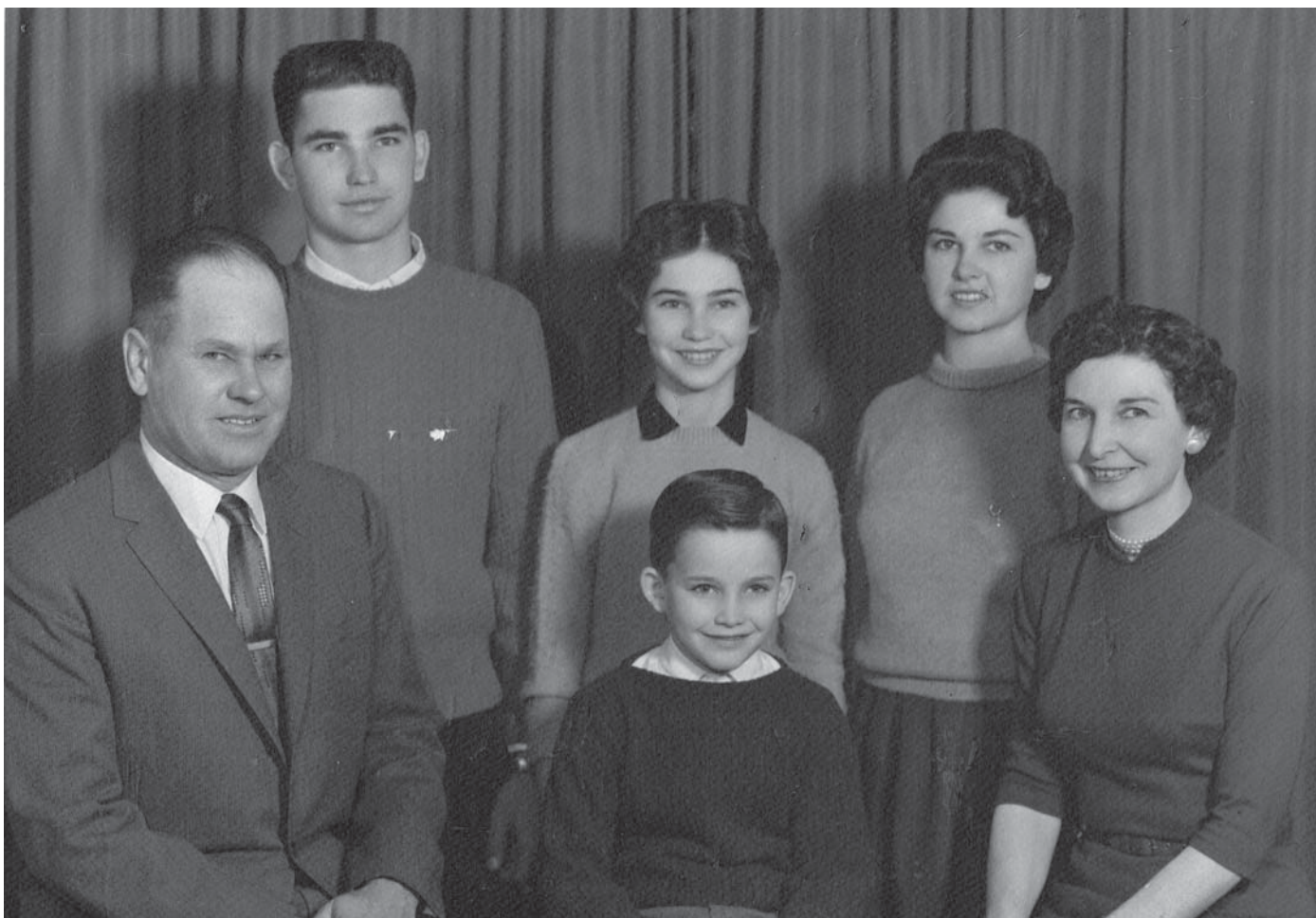
The couple chronicled their experiences in letters to their families in Wayne, illustrating that homesteading required people of grit and determination, optimism, persistence, and courage. In her first letter, Matie wrote that she had grown used to the small homestead shacks she had seen all along the route to the ranch as they crossed



Hugo & Mathea Splittgerber

Wyoming, so the style of her new home came as no surprise. She described a newly arrived “beautiful stove and kitchen cabinet.” In September, they wrote about adding wallboard on the inside of the house, a second room, and new outdoor siding. The couple had three children, all of whom were born in the homestead house—Ernest, in 1914, Berneice, in 1916, and George, in 1918.

Hugo and Matie told of trips to Van Tassell and Jay Em to trade and purchase groceries, including fresh dairy products, tools, lumber, hardware, and all



Back: Loren, Angie, Jeanine; Front: Ernest, Joel & Darlene Splittgerber

manner of supplies. They traveled with neighbors via buckboard to the Rawhide Butte, about 15 miles to the northwest, where they camped overnight and gathered wood for winter fuel.

Early on, the couple collected neighbors' signatures along the route to Van Tassell which they took to the Post Office to establish a mail delivery route. It was a 19-mile trip to Van Tassell to get their mail, so having it delivered was expedited, keeping in touch with family as well as conducting business. Among the many crops homesteaders tried, the most successful initially were rye and potatoes which were sold for certified seed. The Splittgerbers shipped potatoes by rail from Van Tassell to eastern states until disease, drought, and wind erosion put an end to that enterprise. They raised horses, cattle, hogs, chickens, sheep, and various grains, selling eggs, milk, and other related by-products to earn their living.

Hugo helped build the community church

completed in March, 1915, and served on its first board of trustees. Matie served on planning and hosting committees for many events, as the church also served as the community site for ice cream socials, meetings, carry-in dinners, and other occasions. Hugo was also elected as an officer on the local Grange board, and he and Matie hosted a national officer from New Jersey who had come to the area for a meeting. Meetings were well-attended with more than 100 members enrolled.

When Matie became ill in 1918 and was unable to continue living on the homestead, Hugo moved the family back to the Wayne farm so he could be near her in a Norfolk, Nebraska hospital. Hugo sent young George to be with an aunt near Stanton, Nebraska, intending it to be for a short time, but circumstances led to it being a permanent situation. The two older children remained with him on the farm where relatives helped with their care. Matie died in 1927, and Emil died in 1929. While Hugo remained on the farm until his children were grown,



he made frequent trips to the ranch and hired reliable help to oversee the operation. He moved back to the ranch permanently in the late 1930s. Berneice, her husband Elmer Harder, and son Jim joined him on the ranch in the late 1930s and early 1940s. They updated and added several rooms to the original house. Hugo also encouraged his former Wayne employees, Fern and Fay Stiles, to move their family to the community. Their son Dale, or Bud, would become a renowned Casper College rodeo coach whose teams won three national collegiate championships in the 1960s.

Over time, many of the original settlers sold their property. Hugo and others who stayed soon realized they needed more land to make a living. Hugo acquired homestead land from exiting neighbors, including a section south of the railroad loading site near Van Tassell. There he could rest his cattle before shipping them to the farm in Wayne, now operated by son Ernest and family.

Over time, he harvested rye, potatoes, sunflowers, oats, flax, corn, alfalfa, and barley. He encountered problems with hail, worms, frost, and drought... and discovered the best crop was cattle, raising Angus, then Herefords. He built sheds for turkeys, chickens, horses, and cattle, a bunkhouse, granary, and, in 1927, a big red barn which is still a mainstay of the ranch. Hugo remained active in the community, serving as one of its earliest 4-H leaders.

Shortly before his unexpected death in 1946, 70-year-old Hugo was finalizing the purchase of property near the new Prairie Center School, two miles east of the ranch. He had spent 34 years of his life building the ranch land base; Ernest would move his family to the ranch in February, 1947 and spend the next 34 years making improvements to the ranch and the cattle herd. His wife Darlene, son Loren, and daughters Jeanine and Angie came with him from Nebraska, and son Joel was born in Torrington. After completing the ranch's final land purchase, Ernest tore down the old bunkhouse and sheds and rebuilt the corrals. He added a large quonset to house machinery and livestock, built a garage, and he and Darlene enlarged and remodeled the homestead house in the 1950s and



Ernest with his All American Simmental champion heifer

again in the 1960s.

He worked with the University of Wyoming Agricultural Extension Service on projects to better utilize pasture land, building fences to develop more pastures, adding windmills, and planting tree shelter lines. Initially, the family raised Hereford cattle, milk cows, chickens, turkeys, sheep, horses and crested wheatgrass for hay. Later, the operation centered around cattle, and in the early 1960s he once again worked with the UW Agricultural Cooperative Extension Service to performance test his herd. Strategies included purchasing a scale to record weights and crossbreeding the Hereford cattle via artificial insemination to top ranked bulls of other breeds. Initially he hired others to do the work, then in 1969 he attended an AI class at the University of Wyoming, allowing him to do his own work. After trying several breeds, he came to prefer the Swiss breed of Simmental cattle, and was one of the first ranchers in the United States to raise them. He and Darlene were active officers/ members in the state and national Simmental associations. In 1975, the couple received the John Bruegger Memorial Award for their "dedication and contributions in promoting Simmental cattle in Wyoming" from Norma Bruegger and the Wyoming Simmental Association.

Ernest also AI'd his Simmental cattle to Angus and Maine Anjou bulls and raised show quality calves. He and Darlene held annual club calf sales, calves from which won many livestock shows across the

country, as attested by many scrapbook photos and letters from young people. The couple also owned a successful Simmental breeding cattle show string with which they won awards in Denver, Houston, Louisville, and other venues. In 1978, the couple won numerous awards with their cattle at the All American Simmental Calf Show and Sale where they showed the grand champion Simmental percentage heifer; reserve champion purebred Simmental heifer; the reserve champion overall heifer; and the best three head of cattle. Their overall reserve champion heifer sold for \$10,000 at the national venue. They built a new home on the ranch in 1974, while the original home housed a hired hand and his family. The same year, they built an irrigation circle to raise alfalfa and other crops and set up the Splittgerber Ranch Corporation.

One of the Splittgerbers most beloved possessions was their horse, Baldy. Purchased by Hugo in the late 1930s, Baldy had been a cow pony and was entered by his owners in the frequent races at Jay Em. Undefeated, Baldy remained a competitive horse all of his life and could not tolerate being passed. Jeanine described him as running so fast that her body would go numb. Baldy was gentle as could be with children, allowing them to crawl all over and under him without flinching, but when he worked, his rider needed to be alert, for he spotted unruly cattle immediately and went after them with no urging. Loren learned Baldy was a trained roping horse when he flew over his head after throwing a lariat, causing Baldy to slide to a stop. After trailing cattle to the pasture near Van Tassell some 15 miles from home, Ernest would unsaddle and turn Baldy loose to find his way home via the county road. Later in the day, he would open the gate a mile south of the house for Baldy to enter his home pasture. Baldy had his playful side, too. He would come up behind Ernest and pull his cowboy hat from his head with his mouth, and hold it with his teeth. He lived 36 glorious years and is buried below the sand rocks on the ranch, his name and years of birth and death recorded above.

Ernest was featured in several livestock papers for his ranching practices, including an innovative winter tank system, grazing practices, and his Simmental cattle operation. Darlene was a member

of many community organizations over the years and served as president of Goshen County CowBelles, Goshen County Historical Society, and Lutheran Women's Missionary League. She also served as an evangelism committee member in her church and delivered taped sermons to shut-ins. She also volunteered monthly at the nursing home. She served on the 4-H Council and Foundation and was active in Farm Bureau and the Prairie Center Homemakers Club.

Ernest served on a number of boards, including those of the Goshen County Stock Growers, the Prairie Center School District, the Goshen County Fair, and the Rocky Mountain Fair Association. He and Darlene were also active in their church. They were 4-H leaders, she for more than 30 years, and served as chaperones for state winners at the National 4-H Club Congress in Chicago and the National Western Stock Show in Denver. Their children were active 4-H'ers and showed livestock and other projects at the fairs for many years. In all, the family has had five generations of 4-H'ers. Following Ernest's untimely death in 1981, daughter Angie, her husband Bill Babcock, and son Tory moved to the ranch and purchased cattle selected from her parents' herd to begin their own operation. Darlene sold her remaining portion of the herd in 1983.

She moved to Torrington in 1986, but remained closely involved with the ranch and active in her community. In the 1990s Darlene conceived the idea of placing Goshen County historical brands on the wall of the meeting room of the then new Rendezvous Center at the county fairgrounds. A charter member of Goshen Cattlewomen, she asked that organization to sponsor the project. The Brand Room features the brands on leather plaques as well as other historical displays. The project also included two books relating the histories of the displayed brands. Darlene worked tirelessly for many years on the project which was completed when the last brand was placed on the wall in 2011. She had looked forward to celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ranch, but died in July 2012.

The Babcocks continued to artificially inseminate the cattle to Simmental, Angus, and Maine Anjou bulls, and sold club calves and bulls to local and





Splittgerber Ranch

out-of-state buyers. They won awards with their steers and heifers at many pen of three shows over the years. After Bill died in 2006, Angie and Tory continued to raise Simmental, Angus, and Maine Anjou-cross cattle, and followed the family tradition of innovation by utilizing a half-blood Lowline bull on their heifers. Angie married her high school sweetheart, Johnny Chavez, in 2012 and they and Tory maintain the operation. Tory, the fourth generation of the family to live and work on the ranch, lives in the original homestead house. He graduated from Eastern Wyoming College (EWC). Angie, a University of Wyoming graduate, taught journalism at Eastern Wyoming College and also served as testing center coordinator and grant writer. Following her retirement, she was elected to the EWC Board of Trustees in 2010. She was also a correspondent for the Wyoming Livestock Roundup for a number of years. She is a past president of Goshen Cattlewomen, served on the 4-H Foundation, and the Prairie Center Water Board.

Splittgerber Ranch Corporation is owned by the four Splittgerber children. Jeanine and Loren graduated from Colorado State University. Jeanine was married to Ron Loose, D.V.M. who died in 1984. She worked as a medical technologist and is a volunteer in her church in Hayward, California. She has two sons, Brandon and Dustin, and a granddaughter, Stephanie. Loren served in the United States Air Force, where he was a B-52 pilot. He later became a pilot for Western Airlines, a financial consultant, and now owns a sports turf testing business in Tucson, Arizona. He and wife Lyn have two sons, Kyle and Jed, who with his wife Meghan has two sons. Brek, Loren's oldest son by a previous marriage, has a wife, Kelly. Joel attended Eastern Wyoming College and is a graduate of Southern Illinois University. He served in the U.S. Navy for 20 years and is a consultant to the San Diego, California school district. He and wife, Nida, have a son, Kevin, and a daughter, Jeannilyn. She and husband Ryan Turnello have one daughter.



Sen. John Barrasso, Gov. Matthew H. Mead, Rep. Cynthia Lummis, Splittgerber Family and Sen. Mike Enzi

Family members attending the Centennial event in Douglas included the four Splittgerber children, Tory Babcock, and Johnny Chavez. No doubt the only attendee who was an original homesteader was Dr. George Splittgerber, along with two of his three sons, Rick and Ron, and Ron's wife, Vicky. Dr.

Splittgerber was a chemistry professor at Colorado State University for many years.

Berneice Splittgerber Harder's husband, Elmer, worked for Safeway Stores for many years. They retired to Phoenix, Arizona where they lived the remainder of their lives.



# The Cave/Teter Ranch, 1912

## The Teter Family, Platte County

As told by Darla Teter

The NW quarter of section 9 was purchased on March 28, 1912 for homesteading. The patent was issued October 3, 1916 for this land to Wayne C. Cave. The NE quarter of section 9 was purchased on March 28, 1912 by William H. Baysinger, with the patent being issued August 17, 1916. William Baysinger's wife and Wayne Cave's wife were sisters. Following the requirements for homesteading, the land was used for cattle grazing. The soil is very sandy and rocky so is not appropriate soil for farming. Wayne Cave eventually obtained all the land of Section 9 and continued to lease the ranch to local ranchers for grazing.

The Cave family consisting of Wayne Centennial (named because he was born in July 1876), his wife Harriet (Hattie) Sewell, sons Howard Sewell and Enos Wayne, along with William H. Baysinger and his wife Margaret (Maggie) Sewell, moved to Wyoming in early 1912 from Waverly, Iowa to homestead. They came to Wyoming in a livestock railroad car with all their belongings and livestock to start a new life on the western frontier.

To earn extra income, Wayne met homesteaders at the train depot and took them in a buckboard to view land to homestead in the Chugwater area. He ran the Livery Stable in Chugwater. In 1918, a house was built in Chugwater, they moved to town, and he ran the Conoco service station with his sons. The station was sold in 1936 when Enos was hired by Continental Oil Company in Ponca City, Oklahoma.

Enos married Dorothea Lange from Wheatland in 1931, and they lived in Chugwater where their son Wayne Hugo was born in 1935. After moving to Oklahoma, they had three daughters, Carla, Darla, and Marla.

Hattie died in 1915, and Wayne moved back to Iowa in 1958, and died there in 1959. At that time, Enos



William H. & Margaret Sewell Baysinger



Wayne Centennial, Howard, & Harriet Cave



Homestead shack





Cave family at homestead shack. Back: Wayne, Harriet, Margaret, Bill Bayslinger. Front: children Howard & Enos



Howard, Harriet, & Enos Cave



Cave house in Chugwater, 1918



Hattie & Wayne Cave



Wayne Centennial Cave





Cave family (young Howard is standing, Harriet holds Enos) seated behind driver, touring Denver after arriving from Waverly, Iowa



Enos & Howard Cave, 1948

took over the land and continued to lease the land for cattle grazing to local ranchers.

Upon Enos' death in 1995, Darla and her husband bought the ranch and built their log home where they live today, and continue to lease the remaining land. There are no buildings on the property from earlier days. The original well which was dug between the two original homesteads continues to be used for cattle.

The highest point on the ranch continues to produce "agate" rocks which many like to collect. Hattie Cave collected several choice rocks that were made into rings which are still treasured by her granddaughters. Hattie also trapped several beavers from Chugwater Creek which were made into capes that are also still in the family.



Harriet Sewell Cave, 1950



Dorothea & Enos Cave





Chugwater Auto & Livery Garage, Proprietor Wayne Cave



Wayne Cave, Manager of Conoco Filling Station, Chugwater



Sen. John Barrasso, Gov. Matthew H. Mead, Rep. Cynthia Lummis, Cave/Teter Family and Sen. Mike Enzi





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Front Cover Photo: Henry P. Martens (Center) in front of his corn, Weston County  
Back Cover Photo: Splittgerber Ranch, Goshen County