

## **Ayers Homestead Property Historical Site Designation Red Feather Historical Society**

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Summary paraphrased from Eric Jensen's letter to the RFHS requesting Historical Site Designation of the Ayers homestead:

In the Spring of 2013, Eric Jensen set in motion the process of having the partially existing Mary Ayers's Homestead home (1904) approved as an historic structure and an acknowledgment made of the existence of the Frank Ayers's Ditch (1882) by the Red Feather Historical Society.

For sixty-plus years, Eric's family has played an integral part in the history of the Elkhorn Valley. During this time, our senses have been filled with the sights, smells, and sounds of this remarkable piece of property—its riparian habit, rock formations, grass lands, Lodge pole and Ponderosa pine forests, and its wildlife.

Eric Jensen and his family are part of a long history of Coloradoans who have either occupied or owned parts of the upper Elkhorn Creek Valley, which has included: The Arapaho Indians; the Ayres' family; George Weaver, his wife, Marjorie, and father-in-law, Charles Shutt; Inez Robinson; George and Jenny Straub; George and Mary Jensen; and the U.S. Forest Service. Jensen's wish is to share and retain the historical knowledge about the Ayers property with the connection of the Valley to Red Feather Lakes.

In Eric Jensen's possession are abstracts of the Ayers property, homestead patents, original survey information, and historic notes, diagrams and descriptions of the cabin, which were made by Eric's late father, George Jensen. In addition, an invaluable source of the extended Ayers' family, early settlers of the Manhattan and Elkhorn area is found in a 1980 publication, *The History of Larimer County*. By using these resources, a brief historical narrative of man's footprint on the early Upper Elkhorn Creek has been constructed between the years 1880 to 1915.

## Ayers Homestead Time Line

(1880-1915)



View of Elkhorn Creek from the site of the Mary Ayers's 1904 Homestead

**1880**—James and Emily Ayers, and their four grown children (Sarah, Frank, John and Mary), originally from Columbiana County, Ohio via Leavenworth, Kansas arrived in Manhattan, Colorado with their herds of horses and cattle. One of the boys, John and his wife, Minnie, settled on the upper Elkhorn Creek watershed with their four young children; however, the walk to the K-12 school at Manhattan required a walk of some distance. The thought of dangerous animals attacking the children led them to move to a new home near Owl Canyon and later to Ft. Collins. Two other siblings (John and Mary) also homesteaded along the upper Elkhorn Creek until the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. ([Ahlbrandt, Arlene Briggs, etal. Larimer County History. Curtis Media Corp, 1985. pp 163-164](#)). Eric Jensen has no information on Sarah; however, one of the younger relatives, Theodore Ayers, built a still-standing log home on land that is now known as Glacier View—author.

**1881**—In the spring and summer of this year, Harvey P. Fry of the U.S. Land Surveyor's Office, completed his surveying and mapping of Township 9 North, Range 73 West of the 6<sup>th</sup> Prime Meridian. His map and, especially his notes, indicated few Lodge pole and Ponderosa pine in the area; an enormous fire consumed much of the upland vegetation near Elkhorn Creek and its tributaries in the 1780's (tree ring probes of existing trees by George L Jensen). Fry's notes also describe only aspen, various grasses, and small shrubbery (wild current, bitterbrush, cinquefoil, etc), not the trees we see today ([See Land Survey Office map in Index A](#)).

**1882**—Early settler, Frank Ayers, applies “to all whom it may concern” for permission to construct “my private ditch” on the “east side of Elkhorn Creek” for a “length of...one and one-half miles as shown by the map or plat” in Sec. 9, Township 9N, R73 W. paralleling Elkhorn Creek and commencing on June 1, 1884, ([See County of Larimer, Book O, p. 556 or copy of application in Index B](#)). Later, during the 1920’s thru the mid 1950’s, rancher and late-comer to the upper Elkhorn, George Weaver, maintained the said ditch for his mountain hayfields. In the early 1950’s, Eric Jensen played on the wooden remnants of the old Ayers’s head gate and observed George Weaver plowing-out and repairing sections of the ditch in the spring. Because of this rancher’s nearly life-long work in the upper Elkhorn Valley, the Ayers’s Ditch continued to hold water, at least in small part, until the late 1980’s, long after the land passed on to the Boy Scouts of America and then to the U.S Forest Service. Eric Jensen did not research water rights from the time period under study—author.



Frank Ayers’s  
Ditch in 2013  
(Looking west to  
the Mary Ayers’s  
Homestead)

**December, 1887**—Frank Ayers applied for a 160-acre Homestead in the E ½ of the NE ¼ and the NW ¼ of the NE ¼ and the NE ¼ of the NW ¼ of Sec. 8, T 9 N, R 73 W. This 160-acre parcel lies directly east of the present-day Jensen property along Elkhorn Creek ([See County of Larimer, Book 48, p. 31 or copy in Index C](#)).

**September, 1892**—Frank Ayers and “his heirs and assigns” received from the General Land Office, U.S.A. a patent for the above 160-acre mentioned land ([See County of Larimer, Homestead Certificate # 2326 or copy in Index D](#)).



View towards Bald Mtn. from the former 1892 Frank Ayers’s Homestead (NE ¼ of NW ¼ of Sec. 8)

**December 1901**—Sister of Frank Ayerss, Mary Ayers (aka Mary S. Ayers, Mary A. Grant, Mary A. Salisbury, Mary A. Reed, Mary S. Reed Dorf), sold to a James A. McKay the land that her brother proved-up in September, 1892 and ½ interest in the Frank Ayers’s Ditch. (See [County of Larimer Book 162, p. 306 for a recording of the 1901 sale or abstract copy in Index E](#)). A descriptive error was made in the conveyance of 1901 in that part of the “N ¼ of the NW ¼ of Section 8 was sold to McKay,” land that should not have been transferred to the buyer. Eric Jensen spent thousands of dollars and the better part of a year straightening out this early 20<sup>th</sup> Century legal error on his own land. Addition research was never initiated by him regarding any record of Frank’s death or a transfer of the property to his sister—author.

**June, 1904**—Mary Ayers received from the General Land Office, U.S.A. a land patent on a 160-acre-plus property in the NW ¼ of the NW ¼, the S ½ of the NW ¼ of Sec. 8 and the SE ¼ of the SE ¼ of Sec. 7, R 73 W, T 9 N, 6<sup>th</sup> PM or referred to today as the Jensen property (See [County of Larimer, 1904 Homestead Certificate #5900 or copy in Index F](#)).



Meadow view from the pioneer home of Mary Ayres  
in the NW ¼ of the NW ¼ of Sec. 8

More than likely, one or more of Mary’s extended family helped prove-up on the Homestead by constructing a small cabin along Elkhorn Creek, building a barb-wire fence around part of the meadowlands, and constructing a partially-completed irrigation ditch. No indication was found either by George Jensen or his son, Eric, that the ditch had been completed over riparian habitat that separated pasture lands.

See attached [Indices G, H and I](#):

1. [Five-page historical narrative and diagrams of the lap-sided frame structure written and drawn by my father \(G\)](#);

2. U.S Department of Agriculture, Forest Service map of the Jensen land with log cabin location marked in red (H);

3. Accompanying CD of present-day photos (I).



Wall and flooring debris  
from the  
Mary Ayers's Homestead

Entrance  
to  
Root cellar



**October, 1915**—Mary Ayers quit claim deeded her interest in the Homestead on Elkhorn Creek for \$10.00 to Jessie Barnhart. In return, Ms. J. Barnhart “agrees that she will care for, support and maintain” Mary Ayres Reed Dorf and her father, Charles W. Reed, “during the remainder of the life of each.” (See [County of Larimer, Book 315, p 425](#) or [abstract copy in Index J](#)).

After thirty-five years, the Ayers' family passed from the scene along the Upper Elkhorn Creek.