

A SHORT IDSTORY OF CRYSTAL LAKES AND BEAVER MEADOWS

by Winona R. Hanson

In the kitchen of the Painted Post Guest Ranch, now Beaver Meadows Resort Ranch and Crystal Lakes subdivisions, the twelve year old boy devours a large stack of his grandmother's awesome pancakes, slaps his cowboy hat on his head and hurries out to the corral to saddle up his favorite horse. The black and white paint, Chief, comes to him when the boy whistles, eager for a run in the freedom of the hills. The paint has been his constant companion, carrying him on his explorations of every square inch of the pine, fir, and spruce covered hills of the mountain ranch with its meadows and rocky outcroppings. For the past six summers he has been living with his grandparents, George and Alice Drake, on their Red Feather Lakes, Colorado, guest ranch and now knows the ranch and its streams like the back of his hand. In the past the boy has helped with roundups and he resembles the seasoned cowhands with his faded Levis and boots.

He and Chief head up into the hilly western reaches of the ranch toward an abandoned homestead cabin where one of their Black Angus cows may be hiding out. This particular cow has been a wily one, evading the fall roundups. Consequently, it had not been shipped with the rest of the herd in the big cattle trucks parked in the meadow below the log ranch house. His search pays off and the boy finally finds her today, sheltering her young calf in the abandoned cabin. Pleased with his discovery, he herds the cow and calf back to the ranch and pens them up. Meanwhile, he has been thinking about lunch and possibly getting in some trout fishing.

After lunch the boy feeds the kitchen scraps to the chickens, hops on the paint again and trots down Creedmore Lakes Road, raising clouds of dust as he heads to the Red Feather Post Office. It is his daily job to pick up the mail. With the letters safely stashed in his saddle bag, he joins his buddies who are sharing their news and jokes while lounging on the benches in front of the post office. He enjoys telling his own stories and "hanging out" with his friends for a while. Meanwhile back at the ranch, his mother, younger sister, and grandmother are baking, just now removing their famous apple pies from the oven. When he returns home with the mail, after galloping Chief up Creedmore Lakes Road, he is rewarded with a big wedge of hot apple pie.

By late that afternoon he is fishing in the North Fork of the Cache La Poudre River that runs through the ranch for the trout his grandparents will fry for dinner, one of his favorite meals.

That boy, Jon D. Becksted, feels very privileged to have spent ten summers of his youth from ages six to sixteen living with his grandparents on their guest ranch and sleeping in one of the cabins behind the ranch house. A Zane Grey western novel of the same name inspired the name, "Painted Post Ranch," as well as his grandfather's reference to the stripes painted on posts around the ranch that showed snow depth. The ranch brand was Bar 4D which stood for the four Drakes. In those days the ranch summered fifty to sixty

head of cattle and pastured twelve or more horses. It was famous for providing superb fly fishing and delicious food raised on the ranch. Previously, his mother had left Chicago, had come West to her parents' Painted Post Guest Ranch with the children, and sometime later had married John Cusak Becksted, a former U.S. Marshall. His mother, Mildred Cusak, owned the Lone Pine Ranch just north of Red Feather Lakes village, now known as the Maxwell Ranch. It is also called Caerlaverock. He ran cattle on the large ranch. He was such a fine step-father, teaching Jon so much, that the boy took his name.

The Yockey family had homesteaded the ranch land about 1902 or 1903. It became part of the John Currie ranch in the late 1920's. Jon D. Becksted's grandparents, George and Alice Drake, purchased the Painted Post Ranch from Eugenia G. Murdock in 1950. Eugenia had ranched there, raising cattle while also keeping horses, chickens and a large garden. In her earlier years, during World War One, she had served as a military nurse. In the early 1940's, Eugenia's brother cut the logs, hauled them, and built a ranch house for her that now serves as the restaurant at Beaver Meadows Resort Ranch. Several other buildings and cabins were built at the time. Legends seem to abound from those days, one of which concerns leaving out a glass of whiskey on the bar at night for the ghost. Whether the ghost is a man or woman is in dispute. One of the Murdocks' frequent visitors was a Dr. Mall from Denver, of whom it is said, had visited often in Crystal Lakes to escape the stresses of daily life. He had two sons, one named Robert and one named Eugene, nicknamed Tiny. Tiny Bob Road in Crystal Lakes is named for them. While cutting logs and milling them for his Crystal Lakes place, Dr. Mall accidentally cut off his arm at a nearby sawmill. He did not survive the trip over the gravel roads to Fort Collins.

Crystal Lakes subdivisions are on land owned originally by the rancher, John Currie, then by Clarence Currie, his son, and from a parcel of land from the northern and western sides of the Painted Post Guest Ranch. John Currie began buying ranches in the Livermore and Red Feather Lakes areas in 1906. He kept enlarging his ranches by buying out nearby smaller ones, particularly those in financial trouble. He later sold them to Clarence who continued to increase his holdings for over forty years. He owned a large part of the Black Mountain Ranch, located northwest of the Red Feather Lakes village, which eventually became part of Crystal Lakes. The Currie Ranch near Livermore was reported to have been one of the largest in the area, including many well-known landmarks such as the Solomon Batterson Ranch, with its picturesque and historic barn, which he purchased in 1926. Clarence Currie was involved in his community as well as the Larimer County and Colorado Stockgrowers and the Cattlemens Associations. His LOX brand has been preserved in the chimney brick on his home near the Western Ridge Restaurant and Resort located on the south side of CR 74E near Glacier View Meadows subdivision.

An interesting person living on one of the ranches northwest of Manhead Mountain in what is now Glacier View Meadows was a loner known as "Butcher Knife Ike" Morrison. His cabin was located near Wildcat Gulch. He apparently always carried a large knife in his belt. Speculation has it that it was to protect him from bears and wildcats. Many colorful persons and families had lived on those ranches Mr. Currie acquired. Some of their histories have been recorded and can be found in a number of books covering local history or on the Red Feather Historical Society website, redfeatherhistoricalsociety.org. They originally came from as far away as Scotland, Ireland, Germany, Sweden, and

England, farming or mining in eastern or mid-western states along the way, and then casting their lots and fortunes in the West. Some are buried in the Livermore Cemetery or in Grandview Cemetery in Fort Collins, Colorado. A few, it is said, may be buried on land not far from the Beaver Meadows Resort Ranch buildings.

In 1967 Clarence Currie sold his ranch to Black Mountain Inc. In 1969 the ranch was bought by Lee Stubblefield, an investor and financier who had plans to subdivide it. Then it was sold to a limited partnership of which Don Weixelman became a general partner. The 16,000 acres were gradually converted into several residential subdivisions including Hewlett Gulch, Glacier View Meadows, Green Mountain Meadows, North Rim, Crystal Lakes, and Pearl Creek. Beaver Meadows Resort Ranch, a destination resort, was also part of the 16,000 acres. Crystal Lakes subdivisions are made up of 1,600 lots on about 6,000 acres.