Sandstone Ranch

Historical background

The Douglas Land Conservancy acknowledges that the Sandstone property is on indigenous land. It is part of the traditional unceded territories of the Southern Ute peoples.

Before any European settlers traveled to what is now Douglas County, Colorado, the nomadic Ute Tribe had been there. Smaller groups of Utes, known as the Mouache, moved through the area, living as hunter-gathers, following the availability of game and plant foods. Bands of Southern Arapaho and southern Cheyenne, driven west by the expansion of European settlers, also settled in the region.

There was no significant influx of Europeans until after the area was acquired by the United States as part of the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. The Government sent exploratory groups, including Zebulon Pike and, in 1820, Stephen P. Long. Long’s assessment of the area as “The Great American Desert” no doubt delayed white settlement of the area by decades. However, mountain men began appearing in the 1820’s.

Douglas County was one of the original seventeen colonial counties formed in 1861 when the United States Government created the Territory of Colorado. At its founding, Douglas County extended from the Platte River to the Kansas border.

In 1862, the United States Congress passed the Homestead Act, which granted lots of 160 acres to hopeful settlers able to pay a small registration. In return, the settlers were expected to stay on the land, building themselves a home and using the land productively by farming or ranching.. It was a few years before there were significant numbers of white settlers in Douglas County, due partly to the challenging environment, and partly due to continued hostilities with the increasingly displaced tribes. In 1874, the eastern part of the county was broken off to create Elbert County. The citizens of Douglas County voted to make Castle Rock the county seat.

The land that became Sandstone Ranch

What we now know as the Sandstone Ranch comprises 2,038 acres. There have been many European-descended owners of sections of the property over the years.

One of the earliest property owners within the current Sandstone boundaries was Charles Richardson (b. 1831), who bought 80 centrally-located acres. Just months later, he deeded the land to Canadian Ahimaaz Gove (b. 1834), who immediately started constructing irrigation ditches. Richardson moved on to Victor, CO, in about 1895 to operate a mine and raise livestock.

Gove increased his holdings to 600 acres, some of which were outside of present-day Sandstone Ranch. He continued to construct irrigation ditches, which still bear his name. In 1869, he legally established water rights from West Plum Creek, which runs through the western portion of the Ranch. A creek that feeds into West Plum Creek and a canyon are named after this enterprising man.

When Gove died in 1892, the estate passed to his family. Son Asa (b. ?) bought the sections bequethed to his four siblings. These sections lie in what we now know as the Gove Barn area, Gove Canyon, “Club Med,” and Metz Cañon (also known as Sortor Cañon). He continued to farm and raise livestock into the 1900s. In 1902, Asa was granted a patent for a new and improved corn harvester he had developed. His wife, Nona Vantelburg (30 years his junior), was the daughter of neighbor Mrs. George Dakan (after whose family Dakan Mountain is named). They divorced in 1915. At the time of his death in 1919 he was living with his son and daughter in Denver. A few years before his death, he sold some parcels, primarily to Anna Palm (about whom more later.)

The intrepid widow Elizabeth Robinson (b. 1834) moved with her two sons, Schuyler, 14, and George, 11, from Chicago to the Glen Grove area in Colorado in 1874. She raised cattle and chickens and employed men to work the quarry on her land. Because her home was situated halfway along the stage coach route between Denver and Old Colorado City near the entrance of Perry Park, it also served as a hotel and post office. Besides running those concerns, she was midwife to many area women. Eventually, she expanded the property by another 400 acres, including 160 acres in Sandstone.

Elizabeth’s son, George, worked many jobs in the area, for his mother and area ranchers. When he was 22, he purchased his own 40 acres, and in 1888, an additional 40 acres, all of which he farmed and grazed livestock on. He and his brother bought the Perry Park Stucco and Plaster company, shipping much of the quality, cold-resistant product to the eastern US. George excelled at raising prize-winning cattle, which he did over multiple ranches. He became a wealthy man, and, having never married, he left his estate to the family of his long-time farm hand. Upon Robinson’s death in 1946, Earl Tucker, his wife, Elsie Palm Tucker, and their son, George Tucker, each received a third. More about the Tuckers later; first, let’s learn about Elsie Tucker’s parents, Charles and the remarkable Anna Palm.

Charles Palm (b. 1856) left his Swedish-born parents and his birthplace in Iowa in 1878 to settle in Douglas County. At first he ran a lumber business out of Greenland. In 1880, he conducted business in Castle Rock, eventually setting up a general merchandise store at the corner of Fourth and Wilcox Streets, which he ran with his brother, Edward, from 1888-1890. (Edward served as a Douglas County judge.) Charles was quite active in the community and served on the town’s Board.

In 1891, he married Anna Carlson (b. 1870). Anna was a young woman from a village nearf Lidkopig, Sweden, who had left her homeland at age 17 to move to Pennsylvania, where she lived with her brother, Alfred Carlson. Three years later she moved to Castle Rock in 1890 to join her sister, Mrs. Andrew Anderson. That Anna traveled by herself across the Atlantic and then across North America is a testament to her undaunted nature.

In 1897, the couple moved to a ranch in south Perry Park, the old Simey Potts property, totaling at least 560 acres. They worked that ranch for the rest of their lives. Unfortunately for Charles, that was only another four years, as he died in 1901.

Anna and Charles had six children in their ten-year marriage. At the time of Charles’ death, the children were still quite young: Frances, 9; Elise, 8; Helen, 7; Harland, 5, Gilbert, 3, and the not-yet born Edith. After she was widowed, Anna continued to run the ranch with her two sons. Her daughters all graduated from Douglas County High School. She later acquired additional land, buying four parcels from Asa Gove. Harland began buying land of his own in the area. By 1915, Anna and her sons owned at least 920 acres in the south part of Sandstone Ranch, making it the largest of the historic Sandstone properties. Anna lived to age 92 and was reportedly spry until her death in 1963.

The property passed to Harland, who never married. He continued to grow hay and raise cattle on the ranch.

One of Charles’ and Anna’s daughters, and Harland’s older sister, Elsie (b. 1893), married Earl Tucker (b. 1886) in 1913. An Ohio boy, eighteen-year-old Earl had wandered west, working on ranches in Montana and Wyoming until he was 22. Then he *walked* to Douglas County. After he and Elsie married, they lived and worked on the Ben Quick Ranch, then owned by Ben Skeleton. In about 1913, Earl began working as ranch hand for George Robinson (son of Elizabeth Robinson). Earl was active in the community: he belonged to both the Colorado Cattlemen’s Association and the Douglas County Livestock Assocation, as well as Castle Rock’s Masonic Blue Lodge. When Robinson died without an heir in 1946, he left his entire estate, which included his land in the northern section of Sandstone, along with his personal property, livestock, and the buildings, to Earl and Elsie, and their son, George. Each inherited a third of the estate. Earl continued to farm and raise livestock until his death in 1957.

Probate records seem to indicate that when Harland Palm died in 1966, the land went to his older sister, Elsie, and her husband, Earl Tucker, who added it to the acreage they had inherited from George Robinson.

Elsie Palm Tucker was born on her parent’s Perry Park land and thus had the distinction of having lived on Sandstone property all her life. While Earl ran the ranch, Elsie and their daughter, Jean (b. 1918), did trick riding on the rodeo circuit. That was how they met Gene Autry, cowboy movie star, and befriended a starlet known as Gilda Gray. Gilda had been a member of the Ziegfeld Follies before starring in several films between 1919 and 1936. She is credited with popularizing a dance called the “shimmy.” She stayed with the Tuckers for about two years before buying a neighboring ranch in Larkspur.

Jean Tucker married Frank Allen (b. 1912). They moved to a ranch in Wickenburg, Arizona. They had a daughter, Patsy Ann Allen, who, like her mother and grandmother, was a trick rider. After Patsy’s first husband died, she married Bobby Seals, a rodeo cattle roper; they lived on his family ranch in Texas. They eventually divorced but Patsy remained in Texas.

When Frank Allen died in 1971, Jean continued to operate the whole of Sandstone Ranch, incorporated as the Gove Canyon Cattle Company, and served as the Company’s President. In April 1988, she sold the property to Frank Fazzio, a mechanical engineer from Michigan, in three transactions, for a total of $4,181,722.00. She then relocated to Montana.

Later that year, Fazzio bought a parcel of land in what is now the southeast part of Sandstone. He acquired three quarries: a gravel quarry, a silica sand pit that reportedly Coors used to make beer bottles, and a sandstone quarry in Juniper Valley. Juniper Valley sandstone can be seen in the window wells in Denver’s Brown Palace Hotel. In 1994/95, he bought 100 acres in the northern stretch to secure access to the property.

Frank Fazzio continued operating Sandstone Ranch as a cattle and hay ranch. He made many improvements to the property, forming roads to provide access to the large metal barns and outbuildings he constructed. Sandstone also served as a Fazzio family vacation site. In 1993, he built a stone picnic shelter, a yurt, two tepees, a large fire pit, and a playground; the family called this spot “Club Med.”

Fazzio died in 1999 from a cancer he’d been undergoing treatment for since 1991. In 2006, his children sold the ranch to AR Sandstone LLC, a developer. That company planned a high-end development for the site, featuring 114 residential lots, an equestrian center with indoor and outdoor arenas, a community swimming pool, recreation center, and many other recreational options. The 2018 recession led to AR Sandstone declaring bankruptcy and the end of the development plans. The property remained on the market until late 2017, when the price was reduced from $27,600,000 to $18,750,000. That was when Douglas County was able to prevail over private interests and acquire the Ranch in January 2018.

The 1994 voter-approved Douglas County Open Space Fund, which collects ⅙ of a cent sales tax to be used exclusively for the protection of open spaces, provided $9.25 million toward the purchase of Sandstone. The County also entered into a $6 million funding partnership with the Chatfield Reservoir Mitigation Company. The CRMC was formed to seek out and protect, by purchasing or other means, riparian habitat areas in the Plum Creek watershed in order to mitigate the impact on those habitats by the expansion of the Chatfield Reservoir. Additionally, Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), which is funded by lottery ticket purchases, awarded a $3.5 million grant to offset a portion of the purchase price.

Douglas County Open Space owns and operates the Sandstone Ranch property. A Master Plan outlined the creation of trails for hiking, biking, horseback riding, and other amenities. There is a covered area at the trailhead with four large picnic tables. Benches and smaller picnic tables are available along the trails.

We are the beneficiaries of the actions through the years of all these people and institutions. Sandstone Ranch comprises 2,038 acres bordering the Pike National Forest, featuring a diverse landscape, wildlife, and vegetation. Many of the original ranch buildings dating back to the 1870s are still standing. Over 12 miles of trails of various difficulties lead the hiker (or biker, or horseback rider) through the northern and eastern stretches of the ranch. Spectacular sights in all directions awe the explorer: the red rock formations of the foothills (remnants of the ancestral Rockies), grazing livestock, and occasionally some of the elk, bears, or mountain lions which make the Ranch their home. The western reaches, where the creeks run through, have restricted access to protect vulnerable wildlife and vegetation of the riparian and wetland area.

Roger Patridge, who was on the Board of Douglas County Commissioners when the Ranch was purchased, said, “We recognise that the Sandstone Ranch acquisition is so much more than just the preservation of 2,038 acres. It is the preservation of the County’s history, heritage, and wildlife habitat, as well as other cultural and natural resources - a quality of life investment for present and future generations.”

**Sources**

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