

Earl Long Remembers The Way It Was

As mentioned before, we arrived in Round Valley from Nebraska in January of 1898.

Before the folks decided to settle down in Round Valley, they put in a little time getting acquainted with the family and tried to learn something about the country. It was certainly different from Eastern Nebraska. Shortly after they arrived my father's first experience in the mountains was after he volunteered to go out to Ed Gravier's homestead on Eberley Ridge, over the mountain west of Covelo, and help Ed plant an apple orchard. Ed and his brother Walter and Dad left Covelo late one afternoon on their way to Ed's homestead. Dad was riding a mule and the mule was in no hurry. Dad and the mule would get so far behind, the others would have to wait now and then for them to catch up.

As it was getting pretty late when they reached the summit, Walter got the idea that they would make better time with the mule in the lead. They were going down the other side where the hills seemed straight up and down to my father, but still not making much speed. Walter got another idea on how to speed up their travel. He rode up alongside Dad and the mule, grabbed the bridle reins, pulled off the bridle and started whipping the mule down the trail. The mule finally flew the track and went down through the live oak brush, around the brink of a cliff and back onto the trail, still in high gear. Dad was still in the saddle, pretty badly scratched up and hanging on for dear life. When they arrived at Ed's house it was pitch dark.

When Dad walked into the house the women wanted to know what had happened to 'Uncle Oscar' as they called him, with his scratched face and bloody nose. Dad was so happy to still be alive, he didn't make any fuss about what had happened.

They planted the orchard and today many of the apple trees are still there and are in fair condition, considering the trees have had no pruning or cultivating for at least 70 years.

We were in the valley for a while before my father was employed by Mrs. Johnson and her 2 sons, Dave and Frank. We moved into a house in the southwest corner of the big pear orchard where Fairbanks Lane joins Highway 162. There was a well improved farmstead on that corner then.

While living there my Dad bought a machine that, with spools, cranks and levers, could turn out woven field fencing, any height to 4 feet. Dad used his spare time making woven wire fencing which he sold to the Johnsons. He was doing pretty well making wire fence, but about then factory made fencing came out. Dad's machine was too slow to compete.

Mrs. Tanney, my aunt, owned a ranch in the area at the head of Gill Creek. There was a large two story house and some other improvements on the place and she needed someone to care for the place and look after her cattle. She had interests in Covelo and was away from the ranch part of the time. She finally persuaded my father and mother to move out to Skunk Flat. That is where John and Audrey Rohrbough now have their mountain home.

The hills never appealed to my Dad. He kept renting here and there and moving, trying to find something he liked. In about 1905 he ended up buying the Cutler and Warner claims from A.A. Heeser of Mendocino City. The Cutler and Warner claims were 4 miles southwest of Covelo, overlooking Round Valley. It was an ideal summer location, some nice meadows, plenty of water, big pine and fir trees which were worthless at that time. In fact the ranchers tried to burn off the brush and timber so

grass could grow to make more feed for their livestock, which was about the only thing marketable at that time.

The folks put in several years improving the place. They cleared land, build roads, fences and all needed structures. Mother grew a nice flock of turkeys each year. People seemed to think turkeys were only for Thanksgiving. There was not an overproduction. One year Mother and some other growers made up a "fast freight" load of dressed turkeys and sent them by wagon to Eureka. They received \$1.00 per pound which is about what they are worth today.

Mother grew the old wild type Bronze turkeys for years but finally bought Bourbon Red turkey eggs from Lake County and hatched out about 10 of the new breed. These Bourbon Reds were supposed to be more docile than the Bronze and not wander so far.

My brother and I put in considerable time herding turkeys before and after school and on weekends. We didn't mind as we found a good many rattlers that way. Whenever the turkeys found a snake they would gather around it in a circle, all going "put-put-put." There was no mistaking what had their attention.

Turkeys found plenty of feed on the range; grasshoppers, grass seeds and in the fall of the year, they fattened on acorns with very little grain. But, while they were on the range feeding, they had to be watched to prevent coyotes and bobcats from catching them.

I remember on one hot day, my brother and I were out with the turkeys. By ten o'clock they wanted to shade up. Then we should have driven them home, but we both were hungry and thirsty so we left them in the shade of a big oak and ran home for a lunch. When we returned there were no turkeys. After searching over considerable ground we found only

about 20 of them. We took those home but we all came back for a further search, but found only a few more. It was by then easy to figure what had happened. Coyotes had got among the flock and the turkeys had flown away. It wasn't until the story of Mrs. Long losing her Bourbon Red turkeys spread around the country. She had the only yellow turkeys in the area at that time and she began to hear of yellow turkeys in the lower end of Round Valley. They had glided about 3 miles after they were stampeded. She got some of them but lost most of her flock. During the hunting season that year, hunters reported finding yellow turkey feathers scattered in different directions.

The ranch was a beautiful place in summer but due to a 3,000 foot elevation, winters always brought hardship in the way of snow. They had no low range for the stock in the winter.

During the time we were on the ranch, a school was established on top of the mountain but after a couple of years the school, by vote, was moved down to Poonkinney, nearer the center of population. Moving the school brought a hardship to the people in the north end of the district and had much to do with causing the Gravier, Hurt and Long families to move to Round Valley.

Back in the valley, Ed Gravier and my Dad opened up a butcher shop (Covelo Meat Mkt.) Dad was a farmer at heart. It wasn't long until he had rented considerable acreage from the Indian Dept. and was farming on a good scale in addition to his interest in the butcher business. He grew lots of potatoes, beans, hay and grain. He had to take most of the potatoes and beans out of the valley to find a market. There was a ready market for the hay and grain with the contractors who were building the railroad along Eel River,

from Willits to Eureka.

Being no bulldozers yet, all the equipment was powered with horses and mules. Dad had some good teams and a freight wagon. He would take a load of hay and grain to Dos Rios or Two Rivers, as it was called, for a while then go on to Willits or Ukiah for a load of freight and back to Covelo. This was a 5 to 6 day trip.

The main road out of Round Valley went west over the mountain to the river, then west over another mountain to Laytonville; from there down Long Valley Creek for a couple of miles, then west over another mountain and down through Sherwood, then to Willits and on south.

Autos were coming on then but gasoline still came in cases, two five gallon cans in a case.

My Dad hauled a good many loads of gasoline, it having a higher freight rate as many of the teamsters would not haul it, being afraid it would explode. One time I went with my father to get a load of gasoline in Ukiah. It took us 6 days to make the round trip. It was in the summer and we camped

out at night. In the summer the teamsters would pull to the side of the road where there was water for the horses and camp. They would prop up the wagon tongue, then hang a canvas manger between the end of the tongue and doubletrees to feed in. Two horses would be tied on each side of the wagon tongue.

Hay and grain was carried for the horses, a bed roll, some canvases for cover, a set of horse shoeing tools and some extra horseshoes. The horses had to be kept shod when on the road. To pull a load without shoes would soon wreck their feet.

There was the "grub box" with plenty of food but pretty much lunch style. Of course, there was always hot coffee. I enjoyed the camping out but sometimes the dust was so bad one could hardly breathe.

In the winter, the teamsters tried to make it to a stopping place at night so they could get under cover. Also in the winter 2 teams tried to travel together so if they got stuck in the mud they could double up with the teams and pull each other out.

After we moved back to the valley, my Father kept the ranch for many years to use as a kind of vacation and hunting camp. My brother and I went back whenever we could. We took our friends out there to hunt and look after the few cattle they kept up there in the summer. After we moved back to the valley my brother and I had plenty to do beside go to school. We cut wood, helped

plow and plant and put up hay.

Ed and Dad had pasture land rented down on the Indian reservation, in what they called 'lower quarters' then, near where the L.P. mill is now. In real bad weather we had to take hay down there to feed cattle in the pasture. The Charles Hurt highway then was just a long stretch of mud.

One time I was taking feed down to the cattle when at a point about where the Gantz Walnut Orchard is now, I found an old Indian stuck in the mud. He had tried to cross the road and had mired down. I managed to get the buckboard close enough for him to reach and pull himself out of the mud. With my help he finally got out of the rig and fell over exhausted, with one shoe missing. He wouldn't leave the wagon until I had fed the cattle and brought him to higher and drier land.

I learned later the old fellow was a native who had been brought in from the hills when the reservation was first established. They said he was over 100 years old.

After we were in the valley a while, renting land and farming on the reservation, we got

to know many of the old tattooed Indians. They told us some interesting stories of their wild days, when they were much happier.

By 1918 my brother and I, besides helping our folks, were getting lined out on our own. He had his little ranch and I had taken up a homestead on 240 acres along the river below Dos Rios. I was also leasing range on the reservation across the river from Nashmeed.

I was called into the service in 1918. I sold the few cattle I had but I also had a good bunch of hogs. My brother looked after them for me. He sold part of them when they fattened up on acorns in the fall, but when I came back in 1919 I found the cabin on my homestead was burned and my hogs were gone.

I rebuilt and started all over again. Things went fairly well for a while until some more outlaws from Los Angeles moved into the area and bought out some of the other outlaws who owned a little ranch about 2 miles from my homestead. They were worse than the first ones, although Sheriff Byrnes was convinced the ones who sold out had murdered Carter Rohrbough

on the range and got away with it.

The second gang began butchering calves and selling the meat to the resorts along the railroad, making jerky and selling that to the railroad men and making rot-gut liquor they sold to the Indians. Sheriff Byrnes had made up his mind to get them on something, but never seemed able to get enough evidence to make a good case.

I had made final proof on my homestead and was trying to find a new location for a home. I got married about then and we would go into Covelo quite often for a few days. My mother wasn't very well and my wife, Clara, did everything she could to help her.

During the time we were going back and forth to Covelo, where I was also doing some farming, we were told the outlaws had threatened to put cyanide in our flour at the homestead. Clara was quite upset about it, but I figured if they were really intending to poison us they would not be advertising the fact.

When we would come back to the homestead after being away for a few days, Clara would make biscuits and feed some of them to a little pet hound we had. I told her not to feed any of the biscuits to my good stock dogs. I wanted to get Clara away from there as soon as possible. Fortunately, the Harry Henley ranch was for sale. This was above intentions of making it our permanent home.

Shortly after we moved over to Poonkinney the outlaws robbed and burned the house and also the barn at the homestead. During the time the County Sheriff was making an investigation of the fire, he learned that a half-wit who lived down the river from Spy Rock had been hired on a promise of \$50 to rob and burn Earl Long's buildings. But after he had done the job they refused to pay him. That sounded like good evidence so three of them were arrested and charged with arson. The District Attorney, Lilburn Gibson, felt we had a very good case for a conviction. Anyway, as he said, something had to be done before someone was murdered.

The case was brought to trial and most everyone concerned was surprised at the verdict; eleven for conviction, one for acquittal; the one juror for acquittal was a communist as were 2 of them being tried.

Both Sheriff Byrnes and D.A. Gibson were disappointed with the verdict and were in favor of giving them another trial. I appreciated what they had done and rather than go to all the expense to the county for another trial, I asked them to not go any farther with the case. It had taught them they were not beyond the law.

We built another house on the homestead but never went back there to live. We built a good home on the Henley Ranch and lived there many years. That part of Sunset Ranch now belongs to my good friends, Ritchie and Betty Smith. The ranch, now with additional range land, has been renamed Poonkinney Ridge Ranch.