

MRR Newsletter

Madison River Ranch Association

Fall, 2015



From the President's Corner John Clark

I thought it would be appropriate to republish this article from the 2008 newsletter giving a brief history of the Madison Valley where Madison River Ranch now resides. The Association restored the homestead cabin in the common area this past year and we held our annual meeting at the restored schoolhouse on Three Dollar Ranch, which was originally on MRR before it was moved to its current location. It is interesting to know a little about the history of where we all enjoy spending our time. Have a great winter.

The Hardy Homesteaders of Missouri Flats

Janet McAtee and Deb Townshend (Research)
Deb Townshend (Manuscript)

It was the summer of 1909 that Alvin Womack heard the news from a friendly forest ranger at Lyon: The land that Al and his family had been "squatting" on in the upper Madison Valley was open for homesteading. Parts of Townships 11 and 12 South, Range 2 East, in the Madison (Beaverhead) National Forest had been reclassified as having "agricultural potential" and had been turned back for entry under the Homestead Laws.

Al, formerly from Faigrove, Missouri, wasn't a newcomer to the area, having lived in the boomtown of Pony since 1895. He had owned a bar there, married a local girl, Eva Young, and built a substantial house, mortgaged by the bank. When business slowed down because of mines closing, Al lost everything. So he was ready to accept the government's offer of free land---160 acres to any person who would settle down and farm for three years.

The open bench land with its fringe of forest stretched for several miles between the Madison River and Cliff and Wade Lakes. Sleek cattle from

the well-established ranches nearby grazed contentedly on the unfenced grassy flats. The fine powdery soil would produce good crops when watered, Al speculated. The tall, handsome would-be farmer decided to do two things: First, pick a likely homestead on the public domain and then write to all his folks back in Missouri to come out and make the most of this bonanza. Enterprising Al had in mind they could all work to improve their plots and sell them for a profit.

And so the Womack clan came. There was brother Wes and his wife, Jane; sister Lillie and her husband, Barney Mathis; half-brothers Harv Dennis and wife, Stella; Charlie Dennis and wife, Effie; Vace Dennis and wife, Mae; Grandma Dennis (Al's mother who had remarried); nephew Emmett Womack; cousins Jake Womack and wife, Lula; Jerry Womack and wife, Winifred, with her mother, Mrs. Baker and sons Harold and John; and to round out the healthy migration, a large assortment of offspring.

After the tedious journey from Missouri to

Continued on page 2

Inside this Issue:

Introducing... Meet your MRR neighbors, Ken and Karen Rolls, and Phil and Eleanor Botsko. Find out what brought them to MRR, where they are located and what is important to them about living on the ranch.

Ken and Karen Rolls page 4

Phil and Eleanor Botsko 6

Read about the **MRR Board Meeting** – results of the election, the newly installed gate and the UPS shed/FedEx delivery boxes. 5

Enjoy **Martha's recipe** for Sesame Beef 5

Learn about the **proposed changes in fishing regulations for the Madison River** 5

Learn who is on **YOUR Madison River Ranch Association Board** 7

Learn about **bird counts on MRR** 7

Enjoy!

Chicago, then to Pony on the Northern Pacific Railroad, the families stayed there awhile before heading out for their “promised lands.” Of course, they didn’t all arrive at the same time, but within the next couple of years the cabins of Al’s kinfolk dotted the sage-covered benches and hillsides like raisins on a cake. For himself, Al chose a site near the big bend in the river and transferred Eva and their little daughter, Vernice, to the new home.

“Missouri Flats,” the natives called the settlement, and this was set down on the maps.

The Missourians weren’t the only ones to get wind of the new homesteading lands. Jess Connors of Sheridan and his young bride, Johanna, and brother Jack and wife Madge also heard of the golden opportunity in 1911 from ranger Sterling Finley at Lyon Post Office, as did bachelor Ferd Schoenek and his brother, Paul and Paul’s wife, Georgy (Higbee), arrivals from Wisconsin.

Team-drawn wagons crammed with families and household goods stirred up the dust on the long, rough road from Ennis to the Flats that hot July of 1912. Autumn Neely, who was cooking for Reinhold Hippe at his Wolf Creek ranch, wondered at so many loaded vehicles passing on the highway and not coming back. When she and her husband, Vern, learned of the land opened for homesteading, they borrowed Mr. Hippe’s buckboard and drove up to appraise the situation.

A clear, cold stream rushed through a quarter of the 160 acres Al Womack had staked out for them for \$25. “Us from Missouri, two green kids,” Mrs. Neely recalled ruefully, “We figured water there in August was good. You could depend on it, ‘cause that’s the way it was in Missouri.”

The young couple had no more than set up their tent poles when the water ceased flowing. It turned out to be a high-water irrigation ditch controlled by the cow men. Apparently, the ranchers who had been using the National Forest Grazing lands for a long time weren’t overjoyed with the infestation of farmers and their barbed wire fences.

Nevertheless, optimistic Mid-Westerners continued to flock to the free land during the ‘teens and ‘twenties. At the peak of settlement, if a person stood on a height at night he could count the pinpricks of lamplight from about fifty cabins.

Why did these 20th Century pioneers come to this isolated corner of Montana?

As one old-timer put it: “To get away from Missouri! The soil there was wore out before we was born.” Others saw it as a chance to improve their lot in life by getting something for nothing. 160 acres looked like a mighty big piece of property to them, and they figured this might be the last land open to homesteading.

Still others, like bachelors Andy Anderson, Shorty Drobnich, Pete Rahn, Jimmie Skilbeck and Nelson Hayes, drifted into the territory seeking work. Hebgen Dam was being constructed between 1909-1915 and some got jobs

there. “That dam was a lifesaver for the poor old homesteaders,” recalled Vernice Womack Loftin. About 1915 operations began at the asbestos mine deep in Sheep Mountain canyon, and many of the arrivals were employed there.

The Frank Huggins, William DeWinner, Dick Gillespie, Clyde Carter and Fred Young families (the latter two were Al Womack’s in-laws) swelled the growing number of homesteaders. It would be impossible to list the names of all the people who lived at one time or another in the area, but they all shared in the struggle to make a go of it.

When one former resident was asked what they thought to do with the homesteads, she exclaimed, “Think! We didn’t think. We just lived there and tried to get by.” Getting by



turned out to be a pack of hardships in a hostile country – not the “land of milk and honey” dreamed of.

The hardy but frustrated homesteaders didn’t stand a gopher’s chance of developing wealth on their land. In the

beginning and to the very end, the biggest obstacle was the perennial lack of water.

The daily chore of bringing water up from the river or the lakes was something they hadn’t reckoned on. But food had to be cooked, clothes washed, livestock attended to and the kitchen garden wetted down. The proverbial washtub in the middle of the cabin floor on Saturday night had to make do for bathing.

Lucky – or foresighted – was the man who filed on land that contained a dependable spring, as the Schoeneks did. Al Womack ran a ditch from Keller Springs (later the post office site) down through his place and was able to grow thriving gardens. Vernice remembers that “they all laughed at our rock pile near the river, but we didn’t have to haul water.” Shorty Drobnich laboriously dug a well.

Another unconquerable enemy was the prolonged bitter winter. Temperatures would often drop to 40 degrees below. Icy winds swept across the exposed flats, billowing up snowdrifts so a person could hardly stagger from cabin to barn. Frostbite was a real danger unless one bundled up carefully. During a particularly long winter, the hay ran out for some people, and they even had to take straw out of the hens’ nests for the starving cattle.

Transportation was on foot, horseback or skis. The long skis made of pine were for getting around rather than for pleasure. Gladice Thompson remembers how her Dad

Continued on page 3

(Jerry Womack) used to make the skis by putting wood in water in big tubs on the stove. "He'd take a rope and tie them down while the water was softening the lumber. When it was soft enough, he'd bend the ends up. Next he'd put leather harnesses on so we could slip our feet in. Then off we'd go!"

Those frigid winters spent on the flats are vivid memories of octogenarian Johanna Schoenek (widow of both Jess Connors and Ferd Schoenek): "I was froze to my hips every day. I carried water, dug snow and carried hay, fed cattle and chopped ice. If I had never seen that place, I wouldn't be off my feet now!"

The first signs of spring were eagerly awaited. "One way of telling," Mrs. Schoenek recollected, "was to watch the cars (at a later period) go down the road to the Hole-in-the-Rock draw, where the snow was the heaviest. If they didn't come back, we knew we could get out too, but sometimes that wouldn't be until June."

To paint a picture of perpetual misery suffered by the homesteaders because of backbreaking labor and cruel weather would not do justice to their resiliency and spirit of cooperation.

Mutual aid was perhaps the saving grace of the little community. "Helping each other was a Missouri style, be you old or young, big or small," commented Mrs. Neely. When birth, sickness or death troubled a family, the neighbors came to help. Doctors in Ennis were too far away to fetch, so Grandma Dennis and Autumn Neely were often called upon to act as midwives, nurses and morticians.

Neighborliness also meant giving a fella a hand with the building of his cabin and barn. The sod-roofed cabins were small with one or two rooms and sometimes a loft. Usually they were within hollering distance of each other.

Two other things besides the willingness to oblige a neighbor drew the scattered community together – the Cliff Lake School and Post Office. With both of them located at Nels Haldorsen's place, it was natural for people to gravitate there. Serious business and sociability were combined at thrashing time when whole families assembled at Haldorsen's to use his thrasher. The women seldom traveled far from "dishrag and broom," so they welcomed the chance to visit.

There were other good times, too – picnicking and fishing up the West Fork and Madison canyons, baseball games, home talent plays, boating and riding. Cut off from ready-made amusements, the people organized their own fun. The frequent dances held in the schoolhouse topped the list. Couples would waltz and two-step across the floor while Winnie Womack played the piano and Frank Huggins and his son Arde sawed away at their fiddles.

But as one harsh year followed another, the dances became less frequent. Families gave up and pulled out of the country. "Too darned cold"..."Can't get a good crop"..."no water" were the constant complaints. Some put the blame squarely on the government saying it shouldn't have opened the land in the first place. The people were "all starved out," according to one observer. "Lots of

evenings all they had to eat was lard soup 'n spuds." Yet Gladice Thompson says she never remembers going hungry. "if you ran out of some item, you could always borrow it from a neighbor or send to Falbaum's store in Cameron via the post."

The housewives planted vegetables and coaxed them along to canning time. But the growing season was short and so was the water. They churned butter and collected eggs for sale in Virginia City. The men hunted and fished to put food on the table and trapped to get a little cash for fencing. Some cleared trails for the Forest Service in the summer or hayed for local ranches. Everyone worked from dawn 'til dark, but still the living for most was hand-to-mouth.

In desperation, some turned to moonshining. In fact, it has been rumored that everyone on the Missouri Flats at one time or another indulged in a bit of bootlegging. True or not, many a full moon shone down on an active still far up a creek in a rugged canyon. Occasionally, the long arm of the law reached out and grabbed a culprit, but the business gurgled merrily on nonetheless. One sage remarked that the people were able to stick it out so long on the poor land of the Flats only because of the bootlegging.

Pioneering for some families lasted only a year or two. But the majority of the original homesteaders hung on for at least a decade and had the satisfaction of seeing the signature of the President of the United States on their Patents.

One by one, like nursery rhyme Indians, the families departed until by the 'thirties just five die-hards remained. The drama was over. The colorful cast of characters had deserted the stage. Once again the scene was converted to the grazing of large herds of cattle by ranchers who snapped up the forsaken homesteads as they became available – a use far more suitable than farming.

Only a few forlorn and dilapidated cabins survive, standing bleakly on a hill or squatting in a lonely gulch. They serve as mute evidence of the hardy homesteaders of the Missouri Flats, who fought against insurmountable odds and lost.

Thus ends a brief but poignant chapter in the history of the Madison Valley.



Introducing... Karen and Ken Rolls



Ken began spending time hunting, fishing, hiking and skiing in Montana in the early 1970s, long before he and I married. In the early 1990s, Ken and I began vacationing in different parts of Montana with our two daughters, Carol and Kate.

We always enjoyed hiking in the mountains and wildlife watching. In 1997, our good friend, Rick Griffin, another MRR property owner, suggested that we visit the area because he had just purchased his lot on Pronghorn Trail. We visited the Madison Valley for the first time that summer and purchased our lot on Echo Trail very soon after that. Like many of the property owners on the ranch, it was love at first sight.

Initially we put in a well and put up 2 birdhouses. Then two years later we began work on a barn that had living quarters in it. For several years we spent a few weeks in the summer and fall on the ranch. When Ken retired in 2013 after 40+ years working as a physical therapist and athletic trainer, we began construction on our cabin. We have used local contractors as much as possible during all phases of construction but have also learned many new skills primarily related to finish work. It has been challenging at times but gratifying to participate in the creation of our dream. Our good friends, Joe and Roxanne Fritsch, who also own property on Echo

Trail, have been very generous with their time and expertise, and have helped with lots of building projects.

Our oldest daughter, Carol and her fiancé, John, have decided to have their wedding at the ranch next July, so we will be working this fall and next spring to complete the cabin in time for the festivities. We are thrilled that our daughter and

future son-in-law love the ranch as much as we do and chose to have their wedding there. Our younger daughter Kate also visits often with friends.

We have enjoyed meeting our neighbors and look forward to getting together with them whenever we are all at the ranch. I retired in June after a 38 year career as a speech language therapist. Now that we are both retired we will be able to spend much more time in paradise, and enjoy entertaining family and friends, fishing, and bird and wildlife watching there whenever possible.



Important Message from the Board Pat Toalson, MRR Association Secretary

Hi All. Hope your fall season is going well. On behalf of the Madison River Ranch Association Board, I wanted to inform you all of a few updates concerning the ranch.

At this past summer's association meeting, we discussed the age of our main ranch gate and that it would need to be replaced at some point due to the frequency of repairs. In August the gate opening mechanism broke again for the third time this summer and it was recommended that it be replaced due to the lack of parts available. The ranch board determined that the time had come for replacement using the reserve funds in our budget, and a new gate was ordered.

We are happy to say that the new gate was installed and is now in operation. It is a really nice double swing gate and



there is a new entry keypad installed on a heavy duty post. One thing you need to note is a slight change in the combination to open the gate.

The combination now requires you to enter the # sign before the combination, so to open the gate you will enter #1004 on the keypad. If you are using a previously purchased remote opener in your vehicle to open the gate, no changes are needed as it will still operate the gate with the combination you have used previously. If you do not have a remote and would like to purchase one, John Clark has a few openers available (\$35 each). Please let him know if you want one. He will order more if needed. If you are unable to open the gate for any reason, please do not try to force the gate open, but rather use the "cowboy" gate to the side as the same combination should work on that lock. Please let the board know if you are unable to open the gate so we can check its operation.

John also wanted me to inform everyone that the UPS shed inside our ranch main gate and the FedEx box by the mailboxes at the highway 287 turnoff are available for your usage. John will be putting a lock on the UPS shed, which will be the same combination as the FedEx box – **5971**.

Lastly, some have asked, or may be wondering the outcome of the ballot vote on the proposed increase in dues that was sent to you in August. The ballot measure was not approved as proposed and further discussion will occur at next summer's association meeting. We hope to see you there next June.

Cooking With Martha

This recipe is one I found on the internet, and it's easy, quick and delicious! The combination of salty and sweet is so good, and the delicate taste of sesame gives it a perfect finish.

Sesame Beef

1 lb. round steak
4 T soy sauce
4 T. white sugar
4 T. vegetable oil
2 cloves garlic, minced
2 green onions, chopped
2 T. sesame seeds

Hot cooked rice

Mix soy sauce, sugar, oil, garlic and onions in a large bowl. Set aside.

Cut steak into strips and add to bowl. Cover and refrigerate overnight, or at least 30 minutes (I've never marinated it more than 30 minutes and it's perfect).

Cook in wok or frying pan until brown, about 5 minutes. Add sesame seeds and cook for additional 2 minutes.

Serve over hot rice.

Enjoy!

Martha

Proposed Changes in Madison River Fishing Regs

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) is currently in the process of updating the state's fishing regulations, a process that takes place every four years. The proposal has been through the public comment stage, and is being reconsidered by FWP. Later this month, the final proposal will be submitted to the Fish and Wildlife Commission. If approved, these regulations will be in effect from 2016-19.

According to MT FWP fisheries biologist Dave Moser, changes are made to the regulations every four years. When discussing the regulation changes, he said they take input from anglers and outfitters and look at the management of the various rivers and streams in Montana. According to Moser, a lot of the current regulations are a result of whirling disease. Whirling disease greatly impacted rainbow trout in the lower Madison River back in the 90s, but *continued on page 6*

Introducing....Phil and Eleanor Botsko

Hi MRR owners. We are the Botsko's, Phil and Eleanor on Lot 9.

We have 3 daughters, 5 granddaughters and 1 grandson. The prince among many princesses! Phil is retired from the Morris County Prosecutor's office in NJ and subsequently retired from the military installation of Picattimy Arsenal in NJ where he served as Chief of Security. I am retired from Ortho Clinical Diagnostics, a J&J company where I was a research scientist for 36 years.

How did we get to MRR? In the spring of 2000, Phil took a well-deserved fishing trip to Montana. He stayed at the Old Kirby Place. On his last day, he met a man at the \$3 bridge and before he knew it, he was visiting the property, making an offer for purchase and handing over all the cash he had in his pocket! Two weeks later he had a contract. I was unaware! For a year I listened to Phil tell me how beautiful Montana was and how he hoped to retire there. I told him he could, but I was staying on the east coast near family. Then September 11, 2001 happened. We lost 5 friends from our parish alone and suddenly 16 children were without a Mom or Dad. I was devastated.



I told Phil I was ready to retire out west where it was less populated. His response was shocking! He said he had my back and had already purchased 20 acres on a beautiful ranch and filled me in on the details. I was skeptical. In 2002 we traveled west so I could visit

the ranch, I immediately fell in love! We began building in 2003 after our three daughters graduated from college. This year was the first year we have been able to spend an extended period of time at the ranch and I love every minute! I am grateful every day for the peace and tranquility of our small section of MRR.

If you see us on the ranch, please stop in and visit!



Fishing Regs from page 5

since then the trout species has rebounded.

Since the fish have bounced back to a 20-year high, MT FWP believes the fishery is capable of handling year-round fishing, which is one of the changes to the regulations. In previous years, the river below Quake Lake to McAtee Bridge was closed from the end of February until the third Saturday in May. It is hoped that this change would spread out the fishing and it wouldn't be as crowded on the river.

Another change in the regulation proposal is to allow anglers to keep one fish daily and in possession, any size from Hebgen Lake to Ennis Lake. Regulations currently allow only for catch-and-release of trout from Quake Lake to Ennis Lake.

Between Hebgen and Quake lakes, current regulations allow anglers to keep up to five trout daily in possession with only one over 18 inches with all cutthroat trout and arctic grayling catch-and-release only. If the new proposal were to pass, it would reduce the number of fish people would be able to catch in this short stretch of river from five trout down to one.

No changes in regulations were made for the Madison River from the Yellowstone National Park boundary to Hebgen Lake. Those regulations still call for catch-and-release for rainbow trout, except for anglers 14 years of age and younger, who are allowed to take 1 rainbow trout daily and in possession, any size.



Additional Information:
 Mike Moore, West Yellowstone News, September 18, 2015
 Abigail Dennis The Madisonian, September 18, 2015
http://fwp.mt.gov/fishing/2016_19fishingRegs.html

We need your help!

Writers are needed for the newsletter...about your area of interest ...fish, birds, other wildlife, the MRR area, ecology - whatever you are willing to share.

We also need volunteers for "Introducing..." to write about you, your family and how you became a property owner at the MRR.

Please contact Ann Costello, newsletter editor if you are willing to contribute,

Madison River Ranch Association Board of Directors

John Clark, President
(Lot 7)

Frank Davis, Vice-President
(Lot 34B)

Sue McMahon, Treasurer
(Lot 68)

Pat Toalson, Secretary
Gates
(Lots 93,94)

Mike Wells
Roads, Weeds and Common Area
(Lot 112)

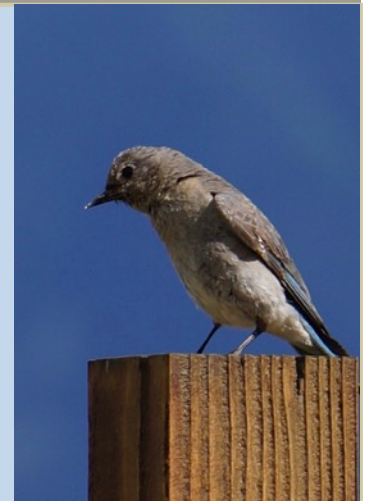
Webmaster, Marv Gibbs
<http://www.madisonriverranch.org>

Newsletter Editor, Ann Costello
noniann@gmail.com



Madison River Ranch: Bird Count Findings

During the past two years, many homeowners in the Madison Valley have been participating in a study regarding the impact of housing developments in Madison County on wildlife in the region. Cornell University and the Wildlife Conservation Society, through funding from the National Science Foundation, are involved in this research.



Bird Count Findings on the MRR sites were reported at the Annual Meeting in June. Overall, 2,681 individual detections of 73 species were made 2012-2014.

| Most Abundant more than 90 detections | Least Abundant 1 detection |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Tree swallow | Barn swallow |
| Brewer's sparrow | Black-billed cuckoo |
| American robin | Cattle egret |
| Vesper sparrow | Cordilleran flycatcher |
| Mountain bluebird | Great horned owl |
| Savannah sparrow | House finch |
| Western meadowlark | Horned lark |
| White-crowned sparrow | Lazuli bunting |
| House wren | Mallard |
| Pine siskin | Prairie falcon |
| | Sage thrasher |
| | Song sparrow |
| | Swainson's thrush |
| | Trumpeter swan |
| | White-breasted nuthatch |
| | Yellow-headed blackbird |

Overall, 34 nests of 13 species were located at MRR. The Brewer's sparrow was the most commonly encountered nest.

If you have moved, or have a new email address, please let us know so that our records can be updated.

Links

<http://www.madisonriverranch.org>

If you are receiving a black and white version of the MRR Newsletter by mail, we encourage you to sign up for electronic delivery. You will enjoy it much more in color! Go to the Madison River Ranch web site, click on the "Contact Us" tab, and sign in to make sure we have your correct email address. It is also posted on the website.