

The history of a parcel of Applegate earth

BY LAURA AHEARN

How much have the earth and the air of the Applegate changed in the 50-plus years since the photo to the right was taken, showing where Palmer Creek flows into the Applegate River? Today, patches of dead Douglas fir mark the mountainsides. The Miller Complex Fire in 2017 left a mosaic of singed and incinerated stands. Increasingly, periods of smoke occlude sight of the Red Buttes (the case when this article was written). But in other respects, the place is largely unchanged. What is the history of this slice of Earth and Air?



A look south over Manuel Silva's homestead/McKee farm at Palmer Creek.

In the prehistory era (before written records), this was home to the Dakubetede. Shasta and Takelma visited to hunt, gather, and trade. How did these Native peoples conceive of "Air"? Coyote told Mole to hold up the sky; Mole held it for a short time and his hands got crooked. For more, see ndnhistoryresearch.com.

Prospecting boomed

Prospectors wanting to mine the Earth followed the fur trappers, who had passed through the valley in the 1830s-40s. After gold was discovered, Table Rock City (aka Jacksonville) boomed. Miners like William Dorn left his name on landmarks like Billy Gulch, seen on the far right of the photo. War broke out between the European newcomers and indigenous peoples. In January 1856, US soldiers and "volunteers" followed Shasta warriors, who had fought from fortifications on Star Gulch, southward past Palmer Creek. The Whites tried to cross a steep hill, and a mule overburdened with howitzer ammunition tumbled into the river. What do we call that place even today? Mule Mountain. It's the high, dark hill on the left in the photo.

Homesteaders looking to farm as well as mine the Earth arrived in the 1870s. One was Manuel Silva from the



Ten percent interest was the going rate for a loan in 1894.

Azores islands. He staked a homestead claim to these verdant bottom lands of the Upper Applegate, borrowing money from Zach Cameron, one of the powerful Cameron brothers. Ten percent interest was the going rate. Manuel was illiterate and signed the note with "X," witnessed by attorney C.W. Kahler, Gin

Lin's business partner in the Palmer Creek Diggings.

In the 1880s four Blacks were living near the Silva homestead: widow Harriet Johnson, with her two sons, who were woodcutters, and Charles Carter, a blacksmith. They were gone by the 20th Century, when Amos McKee arrived.

Amos; his wife, Lottie (Pence); and their children, Ernest, Floyd, and Pearl, moved up Palmer Creek to where Gin Lin and Kahler's crews had built the "China Wall" and diversionary ditches three decades earlier. Amos found some nice chunks of gold and ultimately uncovered cinnabar—mercury. He now had the means to rent Manuel Silva's farm. Their home was on the rise in the middle left of the photo. A descendant still lives there. When Amos and Lottie bought the Silva farm outright in 1908, they turned to—surprise!—Zach Cameron for a loan of \$2,500. Interest on loans had fallen to eight percent.

An interesting side note is that Amos was the son of John and Maryum McKee, who came from Missouri by wagon in 1853 with extended family, including Maryum's stepmother, Roxy Ann, whom they honored in naming the butte where they initially claimed homesteads. Amos was born in 1864 in Logtown, where John and Maryum had moved by 1858.

We know many more stories about this piece of Earth. Pearl married John Byrne, and their daughter Evelyn, now 98 years young, is a founder of McKee Bridge Historical Society. The Byrnes built the home you see in the center of the photo, and Evelyn still lives on a portion of the homestead.

Become a member

Would you like to learn the history of your Applegate property? Or help McKee Bridge Historical Society explore and preserve our heritage? Or get involved in our community events like Christmas on a Covered Bridge? Please become a member and join us for the Annual Meeting at 11 am Saturday, September 28. After we take care of corporate business, we'll have snacks and activities (like bingo, horseshoes, and cribbage), and share friendships and memories. At McKee Bridge, of course!

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