

Sharlot Hall Library & Archives

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Del Rio Springs after Fort Whipple moved on

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By Terry Munderloh

The Homestead Act of 1862 gave the privilege of obtaining a quarter section (160 acres) of land, free of charge, to any person who was head of a family or was at least twenty-one years old and a U.S. Citizen or had filed declaration to become such.

In the September 21, 1864 edition of the Journal-Miner, the following notice dated August 15, 1864, was published: "Know all men of these presents that the undersigned have this day taken up and squatted on the tract of land situated at and near the old site of Fort Whipple, consisting of about five hundred acres." The notice was signed by Postle, Brown & Co.

Robert Postle is listed in the census of 1860 at Tucson, age twenty-three, born in England. After the outbreak of the Civil War, he went to Santa Fe to enlist with the Union Army. He was mustered in as a Second

Lieutenant, First New Mexico Cavalry, on February 7, 1863 and served until December 31, 1863 when he was dismissed and thereupon made his way to Chino Valley.

It's believed that J. M. Brown was a merchant of Tucson and the other company partners, Andres Montagues and Jose Delgado, were possibly descendants of Spanish settlers or reliable, hard working men whom Postle thought he could depend upon to jointly preempt land with the intent of transferring their rights to him.

Although Robert Postle's brief military career was not particularly noteworthy, he appears to have been quite successful as a farmer. The Miner reported on September 21, 1864: "Messrs Postle, Brown and Co. have taken up for ranching purposes the old site of Ft. Whipple. The ranch consists of about five hundred acres. They are now cutting some two hundred tons of hay, which they expect of offer for sale in Prescott this winter. Next season, they will have under cultivation about two hundred acres of corn, wheat, etc..."

On November 30, 1866, the Miner further reported on what was now known simply as Postle's ranch: "During the past season, Mr. Postle has cultivated about three hundred acres which have produced crops of corn, wheat, barley, potatoes, and a variety of vegetables; all of which have matured finely and fully and are now being sold in our market for satisfactory prices. The result, we are credibly informed, promises a net profit of near twenty thousand dollars and shows what an industrious and energetic man can do in this country by cultivating the soil under true principles."

The article additionally commented on the farm: "Among the additions to this valuable ranch is a very fine grist mill of modern construction, run by water. This improvement is a very important one, not only to the enterprising proprietor, but the surrounding community. But there is another addition soon to be made to the established of the proprietor, looked upon by certain parties interested as of the utmost importance to the prosperity of the concern." To what could that last remark have been referring to?

Another early pioneer family to arrive at Del Rio was George Washington Banghart with his wife Mary and their four daughters and Mary's brother, Ed. G. Beck. George and Ed homesteaded parcels of land contiguous to Postle's claims. Here the Banghart family owned and operated a stagecoach station for many years.

David Wesley Shivers, his wife Sarah, and their four daughters left Missouri in the late 1850's for Kansas and then moved on to California. They moved again and eventually arrived in Prescott in 1864. David also recognized the ranching and farming potential of Del Rio and on April 2, 1867, Robert Postle's partner, Jose Delgado, quit claimed his tract of land to Shivers.

So now there were eight attractive young ladies living within the vicinity of Postle's ranch and that successful and eligible bachelor was surely subjected to much competition for his affections.

It was Hannah, David Shirver's daughter, whom Robert chose for his wife. The Yavapai County Record of Marriages registers that Hannah Shivers, age fifteen, became the wife of Robert Postle at Prescott on September

10, 1867.

Hannah and Robert had three children: Rosinda Ann (who died in infancy), Robert David, and Alice. Their estate continued to flourish and their influence in the community grew until, on April 9, 1871, at the age of thirty-four, Robert died leaving eighteen year old Hannah a widow with a three year old son and an infant daughter dependent on her.

Hannah remained on the homestead, no doubt with the assistance of her father, and continued to operate the farm determined to establish a permanent home for her children on the Del Rio land their father had seen as the promise of security. She lived out the requisite period of time there to prove title to the land (as Robert's widow) in her own name and was issued a patent from the United States. It's quite probable she is the first woman in Yavapai County to receive a land patent.

In 1875, a four-year veteran of the Civil War sought adventure in the far west and traveled with a group of cavalry enroute to Prescott. His name was Samuel Rees. His roving days were over when he met, fell in love with and married Hannah Postle.

Samuel and Hannah remained on the Postle ranch and became the parents of three sons: David, Samuel and Carl, known as Tod. Hannah's tenacious devotion to her home continued to reward her and her young soldier-husband and her children with a comfortable living and a tranquil life.

When Robert David Postle was fifteen, he contracted a severe fever and

Hannah nursed him through this life-threatening siege. Hannah's health had become weak with the strain and anxiety of Robert's illness and during his convalescence, she succumbed to the same fever, dying in 1885 at the age of thirty-two.

Without Hannah, Samuel did not fare well as a farmer and single parent. Hannah's sons went to live with friends and relatives. Alice was raised by her mother's sister.

The Postle/Rees ranch ran into debt and as the result of a mortgage foreclosure in 1886, was acquired by John G. Campbell and his partner, James Baker.

Campbell and Baker had previously purchased in 1868 the tract of land originally held by Postle's partner, J. M. Brown. In 1877, they bought from Rafael Acuma, his patented homestead on which the main source of the Del Rio Springs was located.

Water rights were already becoming a hot issue in the late 1800's and the old school of a gentleman's agreement to use water based on who was there first was constantly being contended.

The first claim and location notice for the right to Del Rio Spring's water was made by John Campbell on April 8, 1892, and recorded with the Yavapai County recorder on February 15, 1893, in book two of Mill Sites and Water Rights. The use of the Springs was claimed for all purposes.

By this time, the Baker-Campbell ranch was one of the largest spreads in

Central Arizona extending from Del Rio northeast to the Verde River. Jim Baker and his wife Sarah Ehle Baker lived on the ranch and ran the cattle and horse business of the partnership. The Bakers had no children of their own but when Sarah's sister, Amy Saunders died in childbirth, they adopted and raised her daughter, Dolly.

John Campbell, the financing partner, lived in Prescott. When Jim Baker found the business alarmingly in debt, allegedly due to John's weakness for gambling, Jim filed a lawsuit against Campbell. He prevailed and was awarded a large judgment against Campbell. He also acquired all of Campbell's property, water rights and interests at a sale in 1898 which specifically included the Del Rio tract.

With the advent of the Twentieth Century and the coming of the railroads, two major but unrelated events were to occur in Arizona. These would extend the use of natural resources of Del Rio far beyond the boundaries of the original homestead claims.

(Terry Munderloh is a volunteer at the Sharlot Hall Museum Archives)



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Casa Del Rio, shown here in the 1920s, was the adobe structure that was built probably in the 1860s on the Ranch. The Postle and Rees families were the first occupants and many of these family's children were born here.

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