

History of Canyon of Salmon Would Fill Set of Books, But Frances Goes into Highlights

By Frances Zaunmiller Wisner

CAMPBELL'S FERRY
—The history of this Canyon of the Salmon, were it all put on paper, would fill a set of books. Nor will the entirety be written for this Bicentennial Edition of the IDAHO COUNTY FREE

PRESS. Just the highlights, for now.

Personally, your Frances dislikes 'pioneer' classification. Those early ones were pilgrims in a harsh, strange land when they left where they came from to enter these mountains and deep canyons—to make a home. None of them

came, as so many years later during the Depression, others did—because there was nothing to stay for, where they were living. No, these early ones came from a hunger.

Hunger to build a home from the bare beginning. Nor could it be called exploiting, either. For to exploit is to

take, giving nothing in return. Rather than exploitation, the Ones Who Came First enhanced their homesteads with snug dwellings; fruit trees which bore apple and pear, plum and peach and cherry. There were no wild raspberries in this Canyon of the Salmon, until after bird and bear

scattered seed from the settlers berry rows. Even more important to this Back Country, than mere edibles, were the personalities of the people themselves.

Charley Shepp and Peter Klinkhammer, at the mouth of crooked creek, did not starve those years before their fruit and walnut trees

could supply their needs, as well as produce plenty to sell to near village and the mines.

Polly Bemis set out her chestnut trees. Then tucked asparagus around the boulders. How well Polly knew that the asparagus would provide with little care, and so her bit of tilled

garden could be saved for bean and tomato and the spuds, all—needing both cultivation and water. Her trees still bear each year. Asparagus sends its spears up each spring. All a reminder that a gentle lady once tended the growing things at the mouth of Polly Creek on the Salmon river.

The legend of Polly is well known. Born in China, Brought to America during those years when so many came from China to this land of if-you-work-hard-and-save-you-can-make-money

(nor was it just those from China who thought that. Ask the Statue of Liberty to tell the dreams she listened to in the years of the great immigration.)

It was in Warren that Polly nursed Charley Bemis through a rough gunshot wound. And Bemis, having learned the value of that good woman, persuaded Polly to marry him. 'Twasn't easy, for she was already taking as good care of herself as any husband could. Their love could not

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History of Salmon River Canyon

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have been one-sided, else Polly would have tired of her part of the bargain—Has anyone ever seen a 'bargain marriage' which lasted?

They moved to the river. Bemis named the creek for his wife. And those first years, both worked together. Making a home from a tiny bar above the riverbank. Bemis had the paper work

done, so Polly could, and did, become a citizen of these United States. No danger of her being deported, should she be widowed.

The neighbors across the river at Shepp ranch helped with heavy chores after Bemis became ill. They buried him on Shepp ranch when Bemis died after the night of the fire.

For two years Polly lived

again in Warren. Beloved of the other villagers, she was homesick for the river and her chestnut trees and asparagus clumps.

It was Charley Shepp and Peter Klinkhammer who cut the trees to build a tiny, snug cabin for Polly. Then they tended her woodpile for the rest of her life. Taking care that she had everything she needed.

It was Peter who put an ailing Polly on his packboard then climbed out of the canyon (try that trail up Crooked Creek sometime) to be met at Wareagle by a car from Grangeville. So Polly could have medical care. And it was Peter who saw that Polly's grave in Grangeville has its marble stone.

Peter is near Polly, on top of that hill at Grangeville, now. It was Paul and Marybelle Filer—did those last things for Peter. Not financially, for Peter was able to take of that chore himself. But one can be son or daughter to another, without there being one drop of 'blood kin'.

It was Peter who instructed Marybelle just how the three graves at Shepp ranch should be tended, after Paul and Marybelle moved to the river to live with Pete. Peter who taught her to garden. Endured as she self-taught herself to play the accordion. And Peter loved it all.

The years after Charley Shepp died had been long ones. Now he had a family again.

Just as Marybelle could do no wrong in Peter's eyes, Paul could do no right. Or so it seemed to Paul those first months. Peter said "that won't work" or "nobody can do that" to Paul so many times. And each time, Paul explained until, finally, Peter would agree that he could at the least, try.

But Peter was not being an old stick in the mud, against anything new. He only disagreed with Paul as long as necessary. So in explaining to Peter the 'how' or 'why' Peter watched that young man work all the bugs out of a project, before any attempt to follow thru.

So it was, that when Paul built the cabins for guests, they were right the first time. Nothing shabby or slipshod. And Peter glowed.

Peter helped turn a bit of the ranch into a small-ship landing strip. Saw that strip, and others strung along the river's banks, allow a mail

route to come into the Canyon.

From the beginning, Shepp ranch had overnight accommodation for travelers—for a fee. Now Peter saw Paul and Marybelle caring for their guests—and for a fee. For Shepp ranch became a busy guest ranch.

Sportsmen in hunting or fishing season, but also family groups every month of the year. And Peter looked, remembered how it used to be and pronounced the modern Shepp ranch as Good.

Jim and Anita Campbell are at Shepp ranch now. Continuing the modern guest operation began by Filers.

Mackey Bar got the first landing strip in the Canyon. Mackey did not put it in. Mackey homesteaded the flat at the mouth of the South Fork of the Salmon. And, when Henry Moore asked permission to grub out room for an airship to land "so

nobody else will ever have to ride belly down on a pack saddle for two days to get out of the Canyon so the doctors can dig most of a cast iron stove out of his rear end just because some so and so stuck a box of caps under the stove top, on top of the oven. So first one to build a fire would get blowed to".

And it was Dynamite Moore who dug out the brush. Filled low spots and cut off the humps. Boulders too big to be rolled out of the way, he buried (that landing strip has a very firm foundation). And it was a long bunch of years before the second strip came to the Canyon.

It was Al Tice who turned Mackey Bar from moth-balled placer mine into a successful, modern dude/sportsman operation. The base of the hill boasts neat, sturdy cabins. The former sunbaked flat is green with alfalfa, except

for that landing strip between meadow and riverbank.

It was Guleke who figured a route thru the boulder studded Salmon river's rapids. And it was Guleke who introduced commercial boating to ranch and mine from Salmon to Riggins. Too, he shared the knowledge with those who came later and wanted to learn the river.

Monroe Hancock, Clyde Smith were just two of the many who were Guleke trained Salmon River boatmen. All capable with barge and equally capable in caring for the people who made the run with them. For the boatmen must learn the water, as well—as those beaches and bars which were good places for overnight camp. None of the early boat trips were made in just one day of floating.

Al Tice shocked all the old

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knows when he avows that he will keep Mackey Bar safe. He'll guard it with his teeth and his fists. He'll guard it with his fists and his teeth. He'll guard it with his teeth and his fists. He'll guard it with his fists and his teeth.

While Tye was planning to boat up from Riggins (a motor boat had already run the river-upstream-years before Tye got his brain-storm) Don Smith, son of Clyde, was building boats (and sinking them) trying to work out a boat pattern which could take the rough water of the Salmon. And Don did. Bob Smith, son of Don-grandson of Clyde-went

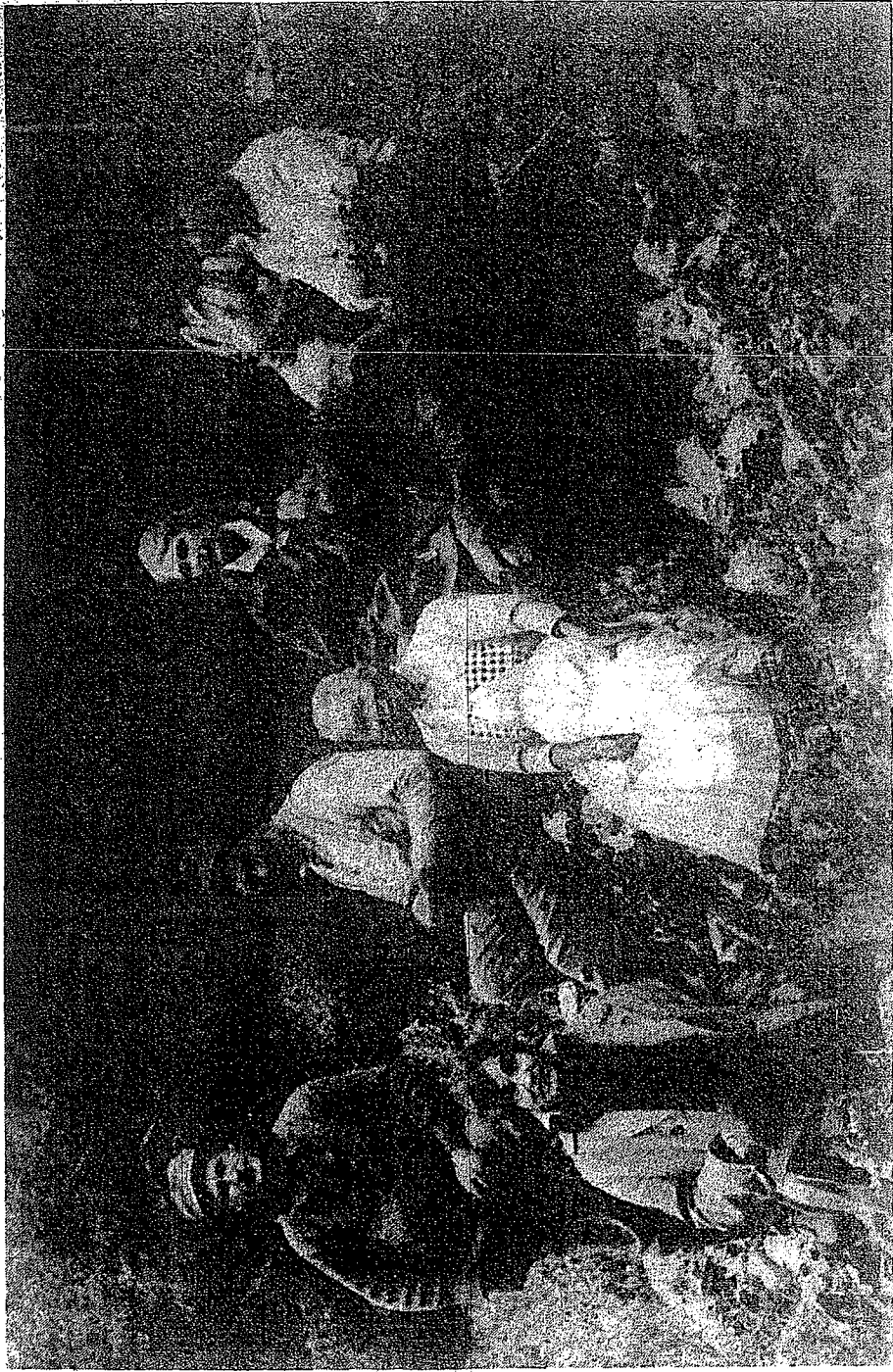
Certain floater types even discourage the Forest Service from any attempt to keep up those trails which parallel the river. As the trail would detract from their solitude. Certainly the thought of men working trail should not be ugly--unless those boaters are playing Dog In Manger. No one but us--which there is so very much more to the Canyon of the Salmon than just the river! A woman watches, listens and wonders why

they were never taught the beauty of sharing. What? Rose, and Polly were building their home from Shepp ranch. Jim Moore came to interview. Stopped on the way across from Cook's Ferry and began to build. It was Jim, near the Ferry, and Chur-ebhill, four miles upriver at mouth of Little Meadow, who brought the black raspberry and dandelion to the canyon. It was Jim, more than any of the others, who taught Frances the way of living in the Canyon. For she came to the Ferry while the old ways were the only way of life.

And he told her of how it used to be. Of the winter when (at the Ferry) Rose Cook died in childbirth. How those men (and Rose) would have welcomed the modern radio telephone for communication and the swift fixed wing plane or helicopter which comes--when someone needs a quick trip out.

Jim's telling her of the past, tragedies was not just for talking. The story of Rose Cook's death, was to impress

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POLLY BEMIS, center, with Charley Bemis in the back, on the right, with a Countess, Gyzinski in front. The countess apparently wrote an article about the trip. Photo courtesy Frances Z. Wisner.

◆◆ Salmon River Highlights ◆◆

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Frances that one made every effort to get outside, while still strong enough to travel, if one expected serious illness. For Rose's time came in January and trails over the top snowed shut in late October. No woman in labor could snowshoe out just because the delivery at home was not progressing correctly. And Jim helped bury Rose and her unborn baby, on slope above the garden at the Ferry.

When he told of Polly and Bemis, that Bemis lived out his ailing years on the river bank—what is wrong in allowing one to spend his final years in the place which has brought the most contentment? Specially when the doctors have given up and said they knew nothing to help the patient?

And the Woman could understand that. She has had a part in that same plea "let me die here, near the river" in her own life. (And that is what she hopes for herself, too).

It was Jim who told her of Truman and Celeste Thomas at Yellow Pine Bar. Homesteaders in their younger years, they were as much a part of the Canyon as the pines until Truman died. Celeste had help in the burying. Truman, when he knew his health was gone had made his coffin. Stored it under a bed (Celeste kept her mending in it—mouse proof, you know—until it was needed for the original purpose.)

Then Celeste sold and moved to Grangeville. Her marble marker is near Peter and Polly and the Harbisons (of what is now called Cook Ranch on Big Mallard) at the top of the hill, in Grangeville.

Joe Myers homesteaded at the mouth of Myers creek. But it was Lee Fida who took care of that ranch until Elmer Allison bought it from the estate after an ornery horse killed Myers on the Dixie trail.

Elmer sold, moved to Lewiston, when his health failed. And the place had haphazard care until John Cook moved in. Allison ranch went thru several changes of ownership before Harold and Phyllis Thomas of Boise

bought it. Now one wonders if it is Allison which is second home, or is it the Thomas's Boise which the Thomas's consider themselves visiting.

Tom Close is so much more than just a caretaker—Allison is home to Tom, too. And his garden and fruits and flowers are proof of the contentment of that man.

Jim told of the CCC road building, which brought a road over the mountain to end near the mouth of Little Mallard. And the long pack trips for supplies were shortened by days—with supplies trucked to the end of the road.

Jim would have treasured the swing bridge which the Forest Service built to replace the ferry boat at Campbell's Ferry on this Salmon. Never again would a traveler be told, "the river is too high to use the ferry now". Never again would the trail be winter blocked by ice too rotten, or thin, for safe crossing. And he would have enjoyed seeing the many who walk or ride that bridge. Either going into Chamberlain or coming out. Just as your Frances enjoys seeing, now.

When the tourists began to litter the river (with their groups of people—not trash litter) Jim would have observed, and kept his privacy. Tho he would have had no comment on learning that Sylvan Hart, at Five Mile creek seemed to hold summer long open house for those tourist.

But, like Frances at the Ferry, he would observe, and then read articles written by visitor working press of the 'isolation' of Five Mile Creek and Jim would not scold this Frances who has closed her door to the working Press. Such a beautiful story could (should) be written about Buckskin Bill of the Salmon River. It would be fascinating, with not one stretched out tale-for color?—but she has never read one.

Just a bit of fact and much fabrication. Jim would not and she does not trust the modern working press. And she closed her door to those scads of tourists who float the river. Tho' many do stop, they are friends of long

standing. Surely a thinking person should not expect one who had personal things she wants to do to play tourist-tidbit-hostess to every floater who makes the trip down the Salmon? Those who do quickly learn that she just will not play that stupid game.

True, the noise of shouting boaters is only a few years being. True That Woman closes her door to their visits. But equally true, she pleases that they are able to enjoy their bits of time in the Canyon. Both floater and power boater. And, knowing how very few were able to see the river before modern boating, she says "to heck with the good old days" and means it.