

PANNEBAKKER FAMILIE NIEWS



Pannebakker

NEWSLETTER OF THE PANNEBAKKER FAMILIE ASSOCIATION

Incredible stories behind old ranches speak to lure of Swan Valley

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The following article was submitted by Marci Kligman.

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HOLLAND LAKE – What strange magic lurks in the Swan Valley?

Do the peaks make people forsake Paris and Chicago for Condon? Would a taste of the lake water turn a doctor into a dude rancher?

These things have happened. The rich and powerful, the inventive and industrious somehow kept getting trapped between the teeth of the Mission Mountains on the west and the razorback ridges of the Swan Mountains on the east. They did so at a time when civilization, defined by running water and electricity, was a six-hour drive to Missoula.

Consider Tony Koessler's family tale. The present owner of the Gordon Ranch represents the third generation there, and the Koesslers didn't start the place. That honor belongs to Dr. R.R. Gordon, a Scottish surgeon who came to America to aid his sick brother, who was living in Minneapolis. Once cured, the siblings decided to keep heading west – with Australia as the goal. "They got as far as Great Falls," Koessler said, "and decided there was no reason to continue on to Oz. They would settle here. That's the way people did it in those days."

Gordon's medical prominence earned him the status of Copper King W.A. Clark's personal physician in 1888. Koessler credited him as the first to popularize sterilizing surgical instruments, first to use anesthetic, first to add a personal tennis court and first to have a brick house in Great Falls.

But Gordon also liked to hunt and fish, and that put him in contact with Charles Holland, who had homesteaded at his namesake lake in the Swan Valley. Holland and his wife were running a guide service and early day dude ranch.

Koessler's favorite, but admittedly unsubstantiated story tells how a pair of travelers, Charles Courtney and Mulligan Dan, were visiting the Hollands. Courtney started flirting with Mrs. Holland, one of the few females in the territory at the time. Charles Holland didn't like it, and tried to shoot Courtney. He missed and hit Mulligan Dan instead.

Dr. Gordon was visiting friends in Ovando, and somehow got word of the incident. Holland loaded Mulligan Dan on a buckboard and met the doctor at Clearwater Junction. In the oral history book "Voices of the Swan," by Suzanne Vernon, Koessler noted that Gordon "performed the necessary duties, saving the life of Mulligan Dan."

"As payment for the effort (Dr. Gordon) took the (Holland) Ranch," Koessler added. "I have had extreme difficulty in getting any verification on the tale, but it certainly makes a good story."

Gordon took the ranch in 1904, but died a few years later. Its deed sat in the Miners Savings and Trust Bank in Butte until 1915, when two of Gordon's professional colleagues, Dr. T.C. Witherspoon and W.I. Renick, bought it. They operated it as a dude ranch and hunting lodge for about a decade, until Koessler's family entered the picture.

Koessler's grandmother, Jessie Horton, was a child of the Chicago Bridge and Iron Hortons, a Fortune 500 family of the day. She studied blood diseases at the Rush Medical School (named for Dr. Benjamin Rush, medical consultant to Lewis and Clark) and got an invitation to continue her research at Louis Pasteur's Institute in Paris.

There she met Dr. Karl Koessler, an Austrian physician with similar research interests. As Tony Koessler put it, "they met over a test tube."

They got married and moved back to Chicago, where he taught at the University of Chicago. In addition to playing concert violin, working in his private library, working in a medical lab, teaching students and seeing patients, Karl Koessler loved to fish. And that's what got him from Chicago to the Swan Valley.

"Karl and Jessie, and his brother-in-law and wife and daughter, all came out to the Binko Ranch at Big Sky Lake," Koessler said, referring to one of Montana's earliest dude ranches just east of Salmon Lake. On a 1924 trip up the South Fork of the Flathead River in what's now the Bob Marshall Wilderness, Karl Koessler encountered the Gordon Ranch and decided he had to buy it.

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“Understand, it was incredibly difficult to earn a living in the Swan Valley farming or raising livestock,” Tony Koessler said. “It’s not much good for anything except trees and grass. But people in Europe and back East were mesmerized by the West. There was little chance to hunt or fish back there.”

“And lots of European doctors had sanitariums where they’d send patients,” Koessler added. “He may have wanted it for that, or because the Horton family was large and liked to visit. Or maybe he just wanted a dude ranch.”

In a few years, Koessler had tripled the size of the original lodge, and added a bunkhouse, bathhouse, storehouse with ice room, four cabins and a saddle shed. A powerhouse contained a small gas-fueled generator that charged 55 batteries to run the electric lights. But both Karl and Jessie died in 1928, leaving 18-year-old Horace Koessler the heir to the ranch.

At 6 feet, 4 inches tall, everybody knew Horace as “Shorty.” He sort of followed the family pattern in reverse, growing up a cowboy on the Gordon Ranch but eventually studying medicine at McGill Medical School in Montreal.

“How the hell he found time to run this as a dude ranch and get a medical degree, I don’t know,” Tony Koessler said. “But he did.”

Now before you start thinking this is one family’s curious history, consider Shorty Koessler’s neighbor, Hank Pennypacker. Hank Pennypacker was the middle child of an old New York family. He showed an independent streak early on. While his sisters studied piano and violin, Hank took up the banjo.

“Dad was always a rebel – a ‘hell let’s do this’ kind of guy,” son Henry Pennypacker said during a recent visit to the Swan Valley. “The family was horrified. They wouldn’t come out to visit.”

At Princeton, Hank Pennypacker’s freshman roommate was Jose Ferrer, who would go on to win an Oscar playing Cyrano de Bergerac. But at the time, Ferrer was just a Puerto Rican student excluded from Princeton’s exclusive dining clubs, dominated by WASP families like the Pennypackers. So Hank ate with his roommate and added his banjo to “Jose Ferrer and his Pied Pipers” band. The friends took their act on the water, performing on transatlantic cruise ships.

Henry’s mother Ann was a hairdresser in New York City, who’d saved her tips to take a ski vacation in Europe. The two met on the ocean liner and went on together to Paris in 1931.

There Hank became a stringer for the Chicago Tribune, occasionally playing his banjo in Paris nightclubs. One night in a bar, he met a man named Jack Doorty. It’s unclear why Doorty was in Paris, especially as he wanted to get to a man named Shorty Koessler in Montana’s Swan Valley. Pennypacker agreed to pay for the trip.

They spent the winter of 1934 in the Holland Lake Lodge. It was enticing enough, they bought their own place between Lindbergh Lake and Condon the next year.

“I never ceased to marvel at what courage it took to abandon the life he had in Paris and come out here and homestead,”

Pennypacker said. “Just think of all the things you had to learn to survive. But they had this sense of independence to do what’s possible.”

World War II sucked all the dudes out of the dude ranch business. But it turned many of them into new homebuyers. Folks like Pennypacker and Koessler foresaw a new life for the Swan Valley: lumber.

Shorty Koessler and a partner set up an operation that eventually became the Wineglass Sawmill. Although the partner claimed to know how to set up a mill, Tony Koessler said the results didn’t prove it.

“None of the guys knew what they were doing,” he said. “They hadn’t the least idea.”

For example, the workers tried to dry the ponderosa pine boards in stacks in a meadow before loading them on Army surplus trucks for the ride to market. The trucks would meet a train at Clearwater Junction and the load would travel by boxcar to eastern states.

“By they time they got back east,” Tony Koessler said. “the whole load looked like spaghetti.”

Hank Pennypacker joined the Wineglass mill in 1946 as a bookkeeper, and soon became vice president for operations. He and Koessler worked there for about four years until they added a drying plant in Missoula, and Pennypacker moved south.

There he participated in Wineglass’ transformation to Intermountain Lumber Co., which had its major facility where Southgate Mall now stands. It also had operations on Russell Street near today’s Good Food Store and along the Clark Fork River where the Osprey baseball stadium sits. It started the sawmills in Darby, Conner and Salmon, Idaho.

“It was the 14th largest manufacturer of lumber in the country when Champion bought it,” Pennypacker said.

Today, the only trace of the Wineglass mill is a metal tool shop in the meadow east of the Gordon Ranch.

“The tepee burner used to be right there,” Tony Koessler said as he drove across the field. “The sawmill was here, and the schoolhouse was over there. Here used to be the dorm for the unmarried guys. Then over there we had six, seven, 10 tarpaper shacks for the families. Including the loggers, there were probably 30 or 40 jobs here. This was a real rural lumber camp.”

Tony Koessler grew up at the Gordon Ranch, learning to ride, shoe and pack horses, build fence and work a mill. When his father, Shorty Koessler, was born, Seeley Lake had no buildings. Tony recalls when there were just two – a post office and a bar. Today, he's a retired attorney who lives in Billings but returns to the Swan every chance he gets.

Pennypacker went to elementary boarding schools and Duke University, but still counts his time in a one-room Swan Valley schoolhouse as his most crucial education. He's now a retired professor of psychology at the University of Florida. The Swan Valley calls him home regularly too.

Message From The President

It has been an interesting winter to say the least. We up here in Wisconsin are pretty accustomed to snow and fortunately do have the equipment to deal with it. It has to be rough on our neighbors in the south. I remember as a child in east Tennessee practically praying for the snow to 'stick' so we could build a snowball. Building a snowman was totally out of the question. Having said all that, we are approaching the all time record for snowfall in our area. I have dug yew shrubbery out of about 3 feet of the stuff in the past few days. The edge of the drive has a snowbank over 6 feet deep. The overall coverage on the property is over 2 feet. Haven't been off the drive in close to 3 months.

Thought I might give you the membership details.

We are blessed with 119 members as follows:

10 Honorary Members (those who founded your organization)

77 Regular Members

32 Senior Members

The breakdown by location: We have members in 30 of the states plus DC and Canada

1 in the states of AR, DC, HI, ID, IL, IN, MD, MO, NE, NY, OK, UT, WI and WV

2 in the states of AZ, GA, KY, MT, SC, VA and VT

3 in the state of OH

4 in the states of CO, KS, MI and our international members in Canada

5 in the states of MA and WA

8 in the states of FL and TX

14 in the state of CA

32 in PA

I have received only a couple responses from members as to publishing a list of names of members so that you may contact each other. I won't create a list without your approval. Again, if you are for it, against it or don't care, please let me know. e address: ronboy1@charter.net
Ready for it!!! My quarterly appeal for help in running our organization. I would love to have a successor. There are other jobs that could use leaders like reunion planning. Just step up, we have a job for you.

Thanks to everyone and stay healthy.

Ron

Pannebakker Familie Association Web Site

If you would like a user name and password, you must contact Bruce Pennypacker at, throwcoach@gmail.com and the necessary information will be sent to you.

Below is the URL for the web site:

<http://www.pannebakkerfamilyassociation.com>

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Pannebakker Familie Association



The Pannebakker Family Association is an outgrowth of the family reunion held at Pennypacker Mills, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania on July 2-4, 1999. The reunion celebrated the 300th year wedding anniversary of Hendrick Pannebecker and Eve Umstat, in Germantown, Pennsylvania in the year 1699. In the words of the Steering Committee of the reunion, "We hope that the 1999 Pfannebecker-Umstat Reunion will lead to the growth of a family association, which will provide a forum for conversation, collection and preservation of information, and a sense of lasting community among the heirs of this rich cultural heritage."