

64. THE ROBERTS BROTHERS CHRONICLES – CONSEQUENCES

For years, a real headscratcher has been the old Zimmerman Place¹ – why isn't it part of the Roberts Ranch?

Trying to preserve a meaningful amount of the iconic Livermore landscape continues to be a losing proposition. In this case, part of the battle was lost more than a century ago...

John Zimmerman. Let's start with John Zimmerman (1840-1919), a Swiss immigrant endowed with unbounded energy. He showed up in 1881 in the upper Poudre Canyon looking for gold. That didn't pan out,² so he built a resort (below).



The Zimmerman's Keystone Hotel, upper Poudre Canyon³

Although long gone⁴, Zimmerman's Keystone Hotel 'remains' the largest building ever constructed in the Poudre Canyon. Opened in 1897, it was an immediate success and soon had a daily stage connection with Fort Collins fifty-five miles away.⁵

Casper and Helen Zimmerman. John's oldest son, Casper (1869-1953), lived in Livermore with his wife, Helen (née Cutler – 1885-1966). For twenty-seven years, he had delivered the mail from Fort Collins through Livermore and on to the upper Poudre Canyon – in short, an upstanding member of the community, well known and liked.⁶

A year apart as boys, Casper Zimmerman and Ernest Roberts had been friends and schoolmates. Sometime after 1905, Casper's wife purchased a 'railroad section' (S27, T10N, R70W – just north of 'The Forks') from the Union Pacific, which was bordered east and west by the Roberts brothers. That hadn't seemed to be a problem, but...

...in 1916, Casper filed on a homestead in Section 22, just to the north of his wife's railroad section. As Casper testified at the trial⁷ "...everything was in harmony, perfectly, but the very minute I took up a homestead everything went up in smoke and the trouble began."

The Zimmerman Place (opposite). By 1940, the Zimmermans had acquired an additional 200 acres for a total of 1480 acres, largely occupying a ridge that awkwardly split the Roberts Ranch in two.

Going over Casper's testimony as to 'the trouble' (above),⁸ you wouldn't be surprised if he and his wife had gone out of their way to keep their property from ending up in Roberts' hands – and so it came to pass.

In 1944 Casper and Helen Zimmerman sold their property to Sidney Tibbits, whose family lived in what is now our house (Chapter 1). In 1973 Bill and Olive Tibbits sold it to Hensel Phelps Construction Co. Subsequently acquired by other local ranchers, it is now being developed.

The building sites on the old Zimmerman Place enjoy views protected 'in perpetuity' by conservation easements on the Roberts Ranch to the east, north and west. The development can, of course, be viewed from large portions of the Roberts Ranch. I suspect that not even Casper would relish the irony.

Why the Roberts hadn't acquired a property so strategically situated for their operation was a question my father never understood even though his role as Evan Roberts' advisor and friend put him in position to know more than most.

As a boy, DL had asked his grandfather that same question. "It's not that good a piece of ground" was the

answer.⁹ DL says he has kicked himself more than once for not buying the Zimmerman Place in the 70s when he had the means and opportunity. Of course, his father, Evan, could have bought it then,¹⁰ but in those days, everyone knew that only a fool would pay \$300 an acre...

In any event, the Livermore landscape has paid the price now.

As to other consequences: It is interesting to speculate what the Roberts Ranch could have been if George and Ernest had been tending to business more and harassing homesteaders less during the first two decades of the 20th Century.

(To be continued...)

Thanks to DL Roberts for his help with this chapter.

¹ Chapter 27

² He found low-grade ore at their 'Elkhorn Mine' and built a stamp mill to enable concentrating the ore, but shortly after, the mill was destroyed by a flash flood.

³ Built with over 80,000 bricks, hand-made and burned on site, this was a monumental undertaking: 35' x 60', three stories high, containing sixteen bedrooms, with comfortable amenities including a billiard hall and barber shop. <https://fortcollinsimages.wordpress.com/>

⁴ Razed by the Colorado Game and Fish Department in 1946 to make way for a fish hatchery.

⁵ In those days, the only way into the upper Poudre Canyon was via Livermore, the Red Feather Road and Pingree Hill down to Rustic. By stagecoach, it was a twelve-hour ride at \$3.00 a seat.

⁶ The trial transcript hints at Casper's penchant for gambling and resulting scrapes with authorities – nobody's perfect, apparently.

⁷ The United States of America vs. George F. Roberts, Ernest W. Roberts, Edward Cooley, et al. June, 1920.

⁸ (more later)

⁹ A somewhat disingenuous answer? (more later)

¹⁰ Because of the Asa Sterling fortune, financial ability was never a question. However, why and when the Roberts family acquired the land they did – or didn't – remains open to question (more later).

