

## 29. THE FERREE MEADOWS

In addition to doubling our cattle operation, the Ferree place presented some additional challenges. So, while Jeanne was calving out the Ferree cows, I tackled the other stuff.

We wanted to install a pivot irrigation system on the Ferree meadow to increase efficiency and reduce labor requirements. But there was so much seepage from the North Poudre canal that large areas of the Ferree hay meadows were like wetlands in the summer.

The first job was to get the excess water off the meadows so that we could operate a pivot sprinkler and heavier modern hay equipment without getting stuck.

I chose a new-fangled corrugated plastic drain tile inside a loosely woven plastic fabric 'sock' that came in big rolls of both 4" and 6" diameter. The 'sock' was an innovation designed to replace the use of gravel to set the tile in. It seemed like something of a risk, but the cost of gravel would make the project ruinously expensive, so I decided to take a chance.

On the advice of the company that would supply the pivot sprinkler, we hired a small contractor from Henderson (east of Denver) to install the tile using a backhoe. The three-man(*iac*) crew drove a hundred miles every morning, worked themselves and the backhoe into a muddy frenzy by dusk, then stopped at the Forks for a pitcher of beer each, and drove home, to arrive bright-eyed and bushy-tailed the next morning - 'rinse and repeat...'

It was a 'braille' operation. We started digging in a low wet spot near Stonewall Creek and worked uphill following the water wherever it seemed to be coming from. The 6" tile was fed in right behind the backhoe and swallowed by the muck that the backhoe had just waddled through. As we proceeded up the drainage-way, we branched out with 4" tile into any tributaries we found.

We laid a couple thousand feet of tile in a couple of weeks. Clear water ran out the bottom at about the rate of a cubic foot per second (a lot of water) and the meadow started to dry up.

Along the old ditches in the meadow were a number of small willow trees that would be in the way of the pivot. We bought an old dump truck and hired Dennis Newlin (1957 - 2014),<sup>1</sup> a friend of Kent's, to cut up the trees and haul the wood off.

We located a used ten-tower, short span pivot in Wyoming that would be more suitable for the soft Ferree meadow conditions than the longer span pivot we had installed at Rabbit Creek two years before.

Kent and I mapped the paths that the new pivot wheels would take. Where they intersected with areas that we thought might stay wet, we laid out old tires side by side, bolted them together and filled them with gravel to provide a track above the mud.

Although bordering our home place on the north, there was no direct way for us to get from our place to the Ferree place without going around by way of the highway - a pain in the neck and dangerous.

We hired Orville Hawkins (1936 - 2012),<sup>2</sup> a big (250 pounds), heavy equipment guy from Red Feather Lakes, to build a pond to hold the water we drained from the Ferree meadow and also to build a road following Stonewall Creek to connect our place to the Ferree corrals.

Orville was fearless when it came to big equipment (and pretty much everything else, too). Before I had a chance to put in my two cents, he had his earthmover down in Stonewall Creek, proceeding to excavate gravel for the road (he was a 'dig first and ask questions later' kind of guy). His wife, Shirley Mae (b. 1938 - 110 pounds if you soaked her overnight) pushed the earthmover from behind with a bulldozer.

Standing on the edge of the giant messy hole that was left behind, I half-jokingly expressed misgivings about whether the EPA would be inclined to grant us an exemption under the Clean Water Act. Orville

snorted and said no one would know after the next flood, and of course he was right.

Calculations showed that to pump water from the North Poudre canal to the new pivot would only require a ten-horsepower electric pump. However, the power line was on the north side of the canal and our pump needed to be on the south side. That meant that I had to get a *crossing permit* from North Poudre. The lady at the office told me a crossing permit was \$500 and that I would need to make application at the next Board of Directors meeting in person.

When I presented myself at the appointed time, I was told that the Board was just finishing up some other business and would be with me in a minute. The 'other business' turned out to be a motion to approve the quadrupling of a *crossing permit* fee from \$500 to \$2,000 (duly seconded and approved). This disappointing news was conveyed with a '*because-we-can*' wink from Harlan Seaworth, the President (1918 - 2002), and sheepish grins from the other board members.<sup>3</sup>

By May we had the Ferree meadow project all finished. We had such a bumper first cutting of hay that we couldn't handle it all. We hired Dan and Larry Peterson to bale both the Ferree and Rabbit Creek pivots with their new round baler and even drafted our son, Arthur (b. 1973), to help with the raking. Everything had gone like clockwork (except for being 'crossing-jacked' by North Poudre).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Old-timers familiar with Fort Collins may remember Dennis. After we wore him out, he became the proprietor of *The Town Pump*, a venerable watering hole on North College.

<sup>2</sup> (more about Orville later)

<sup>3</sup> Taken aback at the time, I later realized this was blow-back for being 'uppity' - "*Who do they think they are, anyway?*" - which we soon became inured to. If Jeanne and I were known at all outside of Livermore, it was as the hippie potters that had the old Cherry Canning Factory on Terry Lake north of Fort Collins (more about that later)

<sup>4</sup> (more about North Poudre later)



Arthur on the rake



Me stacking

### Ferree Meadows Project

- 1. Ferree Pivot
- 2. North Poudre Canal
- 3. Pump Location
- 4. Tile Lines (approx.)
- 5. Storage Pond
- 6. Orville's Road
- 7. Livermore Cemetary



Shirley giving Orville a shove



Dan Peterson baling