

Walker Ranch and Walker Family History

The following pages are an introduction to the Walker family and the Ranch they established in Boulder County. Newspaper articles, oral history interviews with Walker descendants, and research reports were reviewed to bring together this background information to introduce the family and the resources we have to learn more about them. The 19th century and the original couple who established the Ranch are the main focus of the report.

James Andrew Walker, patriarch of the Walker family in Colorado and founder of Walker Ranch, was born in January 1848, in Farnham Parish, Richmond County, Virginia. The son of Thomas W. and Juliet Walker, he had 3 older brothers, 2 sisters and one younger brother, Adam, when recorded by the 1850 Federal census. Jim probably helped on the family farm and got whatever schooling was available.

The Civil War proved very difficult for the family. As the only man in his township to vote against secession, Thomas was ostracized and persecuted by the Confederates, and totally cleaned out later by Union men who assumed he was a typical Southerner? To receive a monthly pay, Jim volunteered for the Confederate Army and served over a year as a Home Guard at the local salt works. Had he waited to be drafted he would not have been paid. The devastation of his home area must have made a move seem very desirable in 1865. He moved to Missouri. Different family members indicate he accompanied a sister and her husband and/or his younger brother, Adam, to the Albany, Missouri area. He probably worked on a farm and may have been able to catch up on some schooling.

By 1869 Jim was in very poor health. Yellow fever or "consumptionism" resulted in repeated attacks of chills and fever and a severe loss of weight. With his life threatened, the doctor recommended the high dry climate of the Rockies. With \$12 in his pocket and weighing 98 pounds Jim took the train to the end of the line in Cheyenne, WY, and hitched rides south to Boulder. A Missouri friendship with the Simon Davidsons, who then returned to Boulder, may be a reason Jim came to Boulder after deciding to come West. In later years Jim's son stated that Jim did not want to come west, but he didn't have enough money to return to Virginia. His granddaughters, however, recall their grandfather saying he had always wanted to see the Rocky Mountains and Indians so decided it was time to fulfill those dream. As later descriptions of Jim state that he was a big man, and strong; easily handling 100 pound flour sacks, we can better appreciate how ill he must have been!

Following the Bear Canyon road from Eldorado Springs up the South Boulder Creek to the Tom Davis Gulch area (on the current ranch property), James built a lean-to and spent time regaining his strength. Oral history interviews with Jim's grandchildren report that Jim spent his first Colorado summer with Indians who nursed him back to health. While numerous Indian artifacts (arrowheads, flakes, and other evidence of Indian encampment) have been located in this area, the Indians were supposed to have all been removed to the Oklahoma territory following the Medicine Lodge Treaty of 1867. The artifacts located in the area (arrowheads, flakes, sewing awls and skinning knives) have been identified as Arapaho. The Arapaho, Cheyenne, Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache were all removed from the Eastern Slope of Colorado.

Jim did regain his strength and the following years found him working at almost any available work. The 1870 census found Jim sharing a home with John Chamberlain and working as a farmhand in Left Hand Canyon. He worked as a blacksmith in the St. Vrain area, served as a guard for a surveying party, did some carpentry work, worked as a farm hand or on shares. He rented land from Robert Culver, possibly the first of his many business dealings with Mr. Culver and began farming. Later he bought land near Boulder. A team and wagon made it possible for Jim to haul freight. One year, he was able to exhibit the best grain at the Boulder County Fair and was mighty proud of the huge silver-plated engraved coffee pot he received. Jim continued to spend summer months in the mountains and bought a relinquishment to a homestead from Lew Jain in 1874.

In 1875 the Simon Davidson family Jim first met in Missouri had a school teacher living with them. Phoebe Fidelia Skinner had come to Boulder in 1872 by train. She was born in Perry County Ohio on November 18, 1841 and may have lived several years with an uncle in Missouri before coming further west. Some say she came to find a husband. Whatever her reasons, she came with needed skills and was serving as a teacher in the prosperous Crisman silver mining area at the junction of Sunshine Gulch with Four Mile Creek in 1875. On September 14, 1875, Jim was a witness when his brother Adam, who followed Jim to Colorado, married Hattie Godsey at the Colorado Hduse in Boulder. On January 6, 1876, Adam returned the favor as Rev. Charles M. Campbell married James Andrew Walker and Phoebe Fidelia Skinner.

The Walkers lived in Boulder, at least during the winter. The summer of 1876 may have been spent in the log cabin on the Ranch. Jim acquired a grazing lease on a quarter section of land immediately adjoining the section that contains the main Ranch buildings today. Simon Davidson owned adjoining land. As the area had not yet been surveyed, some locations may be inaccurate. The winters continued to be spent in Boulder, where Jim still owned land, until the "white house" on the Ranch was completed in 1882. It was in Boulder that William Ely, only child of Jim and Phoebe, was born on March 18, 1877. Following his birth Phoebe's health was poor. Her granddaughters remember her as a frail woman who never again had much physical strength.

Jim continued to spend good weather months in the mountains and during the summer of 1877 he spent \$140 on fencing improvements on the quarter section he was leasing to control his small cattle herd. About 1880 he started work on the livestock bam on the ranch site and in 1882 he filed homestead papers on that quarter section. Work on the family residence probably started in 1881 and by 1882 the white house, root cellar and spring house were ready for year-round residence by the Walker family.

The open range method of cattle raising was the typical procedure of this era. Jim, however, believed in techniques more like his father's farming in Virginia. He fenced his land, using the new barbed wire as well as pole fences, to control his cattle. He cut and kept hay for supplemental winter feeding and built shelters for the animals that he kept over the winter. He planted grass varieties from the east and established alfalfa fields. By the time of his 1886

interview by Bancroft Jim had decided to raise Galloway cattle. He liked their hardiness, heavy double layer of black hair, and improved meat quality. His South Boulder Cattle Ranch had grown to 800 acres with 500 tillable. He had 125 head of graded stock and 5 head of full blooded Galloways. He raised corn as feed for his cattle and the pigs he raised for family use. He kept a few milk cows and chickens were raised. Butter made from surplus milk and eggs were sold in Boulder. In 1886 he completed a partnership with Eli Metcalf to supply beef for sale at Metcalf's Boulder Meat Market. The partnership included Jim's long-time associate, Robert Culver.

Other partnerships and purchases occurred over the years as Jim worked to expand his holdings, buying homesteads when others left. Financial stress caused by high medical bills for Phoebe and need for hired assistance often strained the budget and Jim sought loans or financial investments from partners to keep the ranch in operation. The winter of 1886-87 saw heavy snows and very severe weather over much of the open range cattle area. Many ranchers lost everything that winter, but Walker's techniques proved sound and his ranch continued to grow.

The long-time friendship and frequent business relationships with Robert Culver became a formal partnership in 1890 as they worked together to expand Walker Ranch and raise Galloway cattle, the breed that Culver had introduced to the area. By 1892 they had amassed a total of 2080 acres. Success was still far from certain. Not overlooking any reasonable opportunity, Walker engaged in numerous logging and lumbering operations on the Ranch. Jim's son later recalled that thousands, and possibly millions of board feet of lumber went from the Ranch to Boulder and the Black Hawk and Central City mining areas. These efforts added needed cash or trade income and supplied wood for Ranch building projects.

In January 1896 Jim must have felt his financial struggles were surely behind him when Frank D. Baker, a prospector, rushed to Boulder and declared he had found gold on a portion of Walker Ranch property. Within days, however, all that existed was the germ of an idea for Jim. No gold was found, but he began doing some prospecting and did locate a minor copper vein on which he filed a Location Certificate at the county recorder's office in June 1896 and named the area the Copper King. The small amount of income from the Copper King could not match the financial need when Robert Culver departed in 1900.

The turn of the century was a very difficult time. Phoebe's health was extremely poor and medical bills mounted. Jim was unable to pay Culver for his share of the Ranch and had to make additional loans in 1901. By 1902 Jim was forced to sell a portion of the Ranch and in November 1902 he accepted an offer to sell the entire property. The first payment on the contract allowed Walker to repay Culver for his share of the operation. Fortunately, for the Walkers, later annual payments of \$10,000 could not be made by the would-be purchaser and Walker regained his Ranch by default.

The Walkers were certainly not the only struggling folks as the new century began. The neighboring Kossler family continued to work hard following the death of Mr. Kossler, a miner. The eldest daughter, Veronica, taught school and drove butter and eggs to Black Hawk to earn needed money: Between school terms she helped the Walkers with the nursing Phoebe needed and the work she was unable to do. While Will and Veronica had known each other since

attending school together, their interest grew and on September 11, 1902 they took the wagon and went to town (Boulder) and got married. They returned to the Ranch and shared the house with Jim and Phoebe.

The fall of 1902 also saw James Walker a candidate for a seat as a Boulder County Commissioner. While he did not win the election, the testimonial articles in the Boulder Daily Camera describe Jim as a very respected rancher and business man.

By 1904 Phoebe and Jim were enjoying their first grandchild, Leta. Jim continued to operate the Ranch along with Will and in 1904 Jim signed a one-year lease of the Copper King mine. He then sold his claim in 1905. Those funds enabled him to add 480 acres to the ranch property. An even more important working relationship was begun in 1905. Professor Bertie Langridge, a mining engineer from England, was a Boulder resident. Working as a consulting engineer for some British friends and investors with mining interests in Arizona and California, as well as Colorado, Langridge leased land near Walker ranch in 1903 and 1904. Some of this land was purchased by Walker in 1905. Walker and Langridge signed agreements to allow Langridge and his friends to build a cyanide mill to process gold ore on one acre of Walker land. Known as the Langridge Dyke and Mine, the Langridge Cyanide Mill operated from 1907 to 1914. The Mill was not a success for its owners, but the \$50,000 partial payment received by Walker allowed him to add another 760 acres to his property. Never again was the ranch at risk due to finances.

As the Will Walker family grew, six children were born between 1904 and 1918, various changes were made on the Ranch. The white house grew to include a school room, more bedrooms, and a long wood shed to hold the winter supply of wood. Privies were located at the far end of the wood shed eliminating the cold walk through rain or snow. The oral histories with the grandchildren of Jim and Phoebe (Leta, Ruth, Delia and Jim) give us a rich insight into the warm, caring family that made Walker Ranch their home for three generations. Advances were made in home life, as well as on the Ranch; a district telephone connected the Ranch to the rest of the world in 1906. Leta describes the arrival of the first, visiting, Stanley Steamer car. By 1914 a garage was added to the log cabin to house the Dodge car Jim bought. Jim and Will would only own Dodges as the vacuum pump on the gas line allowed them to drive up the newly completed Flagstaff Road (one lane and dirt) frontwards rather than needing to back up as some other cars had to.

Winter snows were always planned for. The family prepared by stocking up with a ton of flour, 1/2 ton of sugar and home butchered and cured hams stored in the "granary" above the root cellar. Garden grown vegetables filled the root cellar and home canned vegetables and meat were stockpiled. The cattle herd was reduced each fall with breeding stock and year old cattle held over the winter. Hay was stored in barns on many different Ranch locations and cattle were kept close to the barns. They were not snow bound for long, except the winter of 1913 when it took three months to dig out. But a storm in 1912 did cause the family much distress. Phoebe was taken ill. Her "grippe" (influenza) did not get better and the 3 to 4 foot snow depth on Flagstaff Road made it impossible to get her to Boulder to the doctor, or for the doctor to get to the Ranch. Newspaper articles tell of the heroic efforts to get medicine up to her at the Ranch. These efforts were not sufficient, and Phoebe died on March 2, 1912. Burial was in a dynamite-blasted hole in the ground of the little cemetery near the Kossler Ranch.

Jim Walker idolized Phoebe and had always done everything he could to help her. As his health began to decline, Will was increasingly in charge of the Ranch. Bothered by rheumatism, and later suffering a couple strokes, Jim gave his grandchildren a lot of love and fond memories. His lap was a safe haven when little girls got in trouble with their mother. It was at Jim's insistence that electric lights came to the Ranch. A light plant was created in the wagon barn. Twenty-four batteries were charged weekly by a gasoline engine and powered a light in every barn, building and the house. Jim enjoyed a phonograph. Leta and Ruth recall his love of old southern tunes like "Carry Me Back to Ol' Virginny" and "Old Kentucky Home". Younger Delia remembers being told a monkey was in the box making the music and she had to keep her hands out! The oral history tapes, available online through the Carnegie Library, share many interesting stories of the Walkers in the 20th century. It seems certain that Jim passed along his philosophy that one should never abuse an animal and should do anything possible to help a person.

January 18, 1922, was the end of an era when "James A. Walker Found By His Son Dead At His Mountain House Near Boulder Today" was a headline on a Boulder Daily Camera article. Jim was buried in Green Mountain Cemetery, where Phoebe had been moved, following services held at the Elks Home.

When asked about changes over the years, the grandchildren of Jim and Phoebe mention two main things. The Galloway cattle were replaced by Herefords about 1939-1940. This was done because of running some of their cattle on the Forest Service open range, and mixed breeding reduced the value of the off spring. There also was difficulty in securing good breeding stock. The second major event was the selling of Walker Ranch, all 6,450 acres, to Dr. Oliver Taylor of Boulder. The family tells us the sale was due to dropping cattle prices, encroaching trees that reduced usable pasture land, growing numbers of people brought into the area by newly completed Gross Reservoir were leaving gates open and interfering with their ranch operations, Will's advancing age and other factors. The peaceful solitude of their beautiful location became less peaceful. It was time for a change. Boulder County Parks & Open Space's purchase of the land began in 1977, and Walker Ranch was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1984.

JAMES A. WALKER. BOULDER, COLORADO, JUNE 14TH, 1886. DICTATION.

Was born in Virginia in the year 1848. He lived there until 1865, attending the common school a little. His Father was a Farmer, and he worked on the farm. In 1865 he moved to Missouri where he farmed for four years. In 1869, he came to Boulder County, Colorado. He first engaged as a farm hand, working by the month, and after a little while began farming on shares. He has been farming and stock raising ever since. He located upon his present property in 1876. He is now devoting his attention to Galloway Cattle. The thick, tough hide and long hair of this breed make them capable of enduring long hard winters, better than any other breed of cattle. He has eight hundred acres of land in his ranche, seven and one half miles from Boulder, on South Boulder Slope. Five hundred acres are tillable. His place is called the South Boulder Cattle Ranch. He has 125 head of graded stock, Galloways, and five head of full blooded Galloways. The cattle range has been overstocked.

- 1. Stock men must lessen their herds, and increase the grade of their stock. Mr. Walker, after having tried all other kinds of cattle he could get here, is thoroughly convinced that the Galloway Cattle are the best for the purpose in the mountains. He estimates he has made over fifteen thousand dollars in the ten years he has been in the business. He had twelve dollars to start with. He finds that the Eastern grasses do very well at an altitude of five or six thousand feet. He thinks Boulder County is one of the best agricultural counties in the state of Colorado, and offers a good field for investment. Mr. Walker has raised upon his ranche, and offers the agricultural records in proof, 92 bushels of corn per acre, for one hundred acres, corn shelled. Likes the climate very much.*

He was in poor health when he came to Colorado, and has now fully regained his health. Climate especially beneficial to lung diseases.

James A. Walker, Personal Statement.

Bancroft manuscript. 1886.

University of Colorado Western Historical Collections,
Boulder, Colorado

This manuscript has been retyped including the typographical errors that appeared in the original.