

Reynolds Park Historical Background

A real mountain ranch resort with all home comforts. Located among the fragrant pines just at the boundary line between civilization and untouched nature, the surroundings are delightfully inviting and positively ideal.

Blessed with a splendid climate – warm in the sun, cool in the shade – positively no mosquitoes.

There are numerous mountain trails for hiking, mountain streams for wading and a profusion of wildflowers.

Idylease Resort and Ranch brochure, 1913

Reynolds Park ranges in altitude from 6,800 feet to 8,000 feet. Many gulches intersect steep, rocky formations above Casto Creek and the surrounding meadows of Reynolds Park. An abundance of trees, shrubs, plants and wildflowers adorn the park, welcoming a wide range of wildlife as well as city-weary visitors to this remote haven. Reynolds Park, once known as the “Bar Lazy T” Ranch and as Idylease Resort and Ranch, also has a more distant past.

For over 10,000 years, hunter-gatherers migrated through the Front Range area, wintering in sheltered lowland areas of southeastern Jefferson County. From 12,000 to 7,000 years ago, Paleo Indians followed wildlife and ripening vegetation from the plains to progressively higher elevations as far away as South, Middle and North Parks, and then returned to lower elevation valley sites before beginning their annual cycle again.

From 7,000 to about 2,000 years ago, semi-nomadic Archaic Indians settled in camps along the foothills, occupying open ridges, valleys and shelters among rock outcrops. They chose locations offering a reliable water source, shelter, diversity of plant and animal resources, and unobstructed views. Small groups began to stay in one place long enough to construct shelters and cultivate plants.

From 2,000 to 200 years ago Plains Ceramic Stage Native Americans were the first to use pottery and the bow and arrow. The Foothills region provided hunting grounds for multiple tribes, and the lowland areas continued to be used for winter camps and seasonal meeting grounds.

As miners arrived in the region they traveled up these same canyons. One of the primary routes that carried pack train to Leadville, a thriving mining community, crossed Reynolds Park. A narrow gauge railroad line was constructed in 1878, and Foxton was designated as “Park Siding.” The Probert family were the first settlers in Park Siding. Mr. Probert was from England or Scotland, and was highly skilled quarryman in the Platte Canyon quarries around Foxton. Quarrying continued in the Platte Canyon until 1936 when the railroad was scrapped.

“Park Siding” was renamed in 1904 by an Englishman named Roach in honor of a “Foxton Hall” somewhere in England. Mr. Roach also opened up a wagon road from the foot of Kennedy Gulch, bridging the Platte River, and then finished up on the south side of the Platte to Foxton, where he bridged the river again.

In 1895 Bennet B. Shepperd applied for a homestead patent on this property, and, in 1908, Louise Rutledge applied for a patent nearby. Louise’s husband, Colonel Rutledge, a personal friend of William Cody, built a three-room house, insulated with hay in the loft. The house served as a stop for pack trains from Denver to Leadville.

In 1913 Colonel Ruttledge sold his property to John A. Reynolds and his first wife. The couple had moved from New York when Mrs. Reynolds developed tuberculosis. Mrs. Reynolds had been a stage dancer and Mr. Reynolds a stagehand. Reynolds filed a homestead of 640 acres on December 10, 1919. He purchased Bennet B. Shepperd's homestead, and later added 160 acres from Tom Butterfield.

Reynolds added to the original house, and later remodeled it. He milled lumber on the property, and harvested firewood. In 1913, after building four small new cabins, and repairing the ten Mormon cabins in Piano Meadows, Reynolds and his wife opened their ranch as a "guest ranch." The cabins were all given names that ran together, such as, "Dodropin." The Reynolds only invited those people whom they chose to include, and each visitor received a folder, complete with pictures, as a personal invitation to the ranch.

Many Idylease Ranch visitors were actors from the East and came on the Colorado and Southern Railroad to Dawson's Station, two miles away. Mr. Reynolds met them with his car, one of three vehicles in the area at the time. Mrs. Reynolds did all of the cooking, and hired help did the cleaning. Food was served formally, and carried from the kitchen on plates. Meat was purchased in Denver, but vegetables were grown on the ranch, and milk cows, chickens and calves were kept for ranch use.

During their stay, guests enjoyed a wide variety of activities. Horses were kept for riding, hunting was enjoyed, and dances were held. On Sunday nights in the summer they held a wiener roast by Casto Creek to the west of the ranch house.

Mrs. Reynolds sold railroad ties, Christmas trees and cedar posts to supplement their ranch income. At one time Mr. Reynolds had an employee named Lee McCandliss, who walked the ranch for three or more days each fall, scaring the herd of 13 big horn sheep out of the area to ensure their survival.

A major flood in 1933 completely washed away a large natural stone arch, its top 50 feet above the road bed, that originally stood just south of the ranch's southern boundary.

Idylease Ranch operated from 1913 until 1942. It is uncertain when Mrs. Reynolds died, but John Reynolds remarried and his second wife, Eva Dell Reynolds, lived on Reynolds as a working ranch from 1948 until 1975. The ranch became too much for Eva to manage after John died of cancer in 1954. She couldn't afford to pay the taxes on the ranch, so, to avoid losing the ranch entirely, she burned down the cabins in Piano Meadows.

Reynolds Ranch was acquired by Jefferson County Open Space from the Matthes-Reynolds family on May 28, 1975, with Mrs. Eva Dell Reynolds making a gift of the ranch house, buildings and a part of the land as a memorial to her husband, John A. Reynolds. Reynolds Park was listed on the State Register of Historic Sites on February 4, 1977, and dedicated on October 21, 1977. A second tract of land was purchased from John and Vivian Tekler in 1980, and a third tract was acquired in 2001 from Open Lands Inc., a.k.a. Quapaw Investments. As homesteaded land, Reynolds Park truly represents the history and heritage of Jefferson County's pioneers and early settlers.