

Van Bibber Park Historical Background

It is easy to imagine Native Americans camping in the meadow at Van Bibber Park while following their seasonal rotation in search of food and other supplies. However, no tangible evidence of their using the area remains. Van Bibber Park takes its name from Van Bibber Creek, named for a homesteader who settled somewhere east of the mouth of Ralston Canyon. Just east of the park, Van Bibber Creek was also called Dry Creek, because it dried up just short of joining Ralston Creek.

The arrival of Van Bibber and other homesteaders in the Arvada, Fairmount and Wheat Ridge area is recorded in the 1910 Jefferson County tax and assessment books, but no precise dates for homesteading can be determined in the vicinity of the park prior to 1910.

Most frontier homesteads were “proved up” and long term ownership was conveyed after five years of living on the property and building improvements on it. Many Easterners felt the thing that really separated the east from the western frontier was the absence of trees. So, “tree grant” homesteads were created to transform the west. Tree grant homesteads were “proved up” by living on the property and planting a specified number of trees and then keeping them alive. Most tree grant homesteads failed. Like much of the fertile valley and hilltop areas of Arvada, Fairmount and Wheat Ridge, the area around Van Bibber Park was apparently homesteaded as tree grant properties. The horse properties now seen to the north of Van Bibber Creek were originally platted on February 17, 1910, as Arvada Fruit Gardens. Also in 1910, Claus A. Hillberg also platted the New Rochelle Subdivision across Thomas Ward’s Road from what is now the park.

According to tax records, while still living in Durango, Colorado, Bernhard Glaser, and Arthur L. and Eugenia A. Davis claimed homesteads on what is today’s Van Bibber Park. By 1910 they had taken up permanent residence on their homesteads, and planted apple and cherry orchards on the hilltop south of the park and in the valley. Shortly, Eugenia acquired Bernhard Glaser’s homestead, and in 1942, upon Eugenia’s death, Arthur and Eugenia’s children, Howard R. Davis and Florence D. Howard, inherited all three homesteads

The Bandimere family had homesteaded in the area of 48th Avenue and Eldridge. Their older son later built Bandimere Speedway. A younger son, Horace, had worked for the Davis family, helping them with their irrigation ditches, planting trees, and harvesting fruit. In 1942, the Davis children sold Horace their farm.

Horace and his wife, Marjorie, moved their nine children into the large farmhouse in the valley. Shortly after moving into the farmhouse it burned to the ground. So, Horace and Marjorie moved their large family into the one-room house built earlier by the original homesteaders. This house had holes in the wall on the north side, and the kids were told that the Davises had shot at the Indians through those holes! There was also a rock house on property, up on the ridge.

By 1942 the fruit trees were too old to produce fruit, so Horace dynamited them! He planted corn and hay, and had cattle for a dairy farm. Horace and his family were typical dairy farmers, always working, milking, mowing, and fighting for their share of the ditch water, often walking along the ditch for miles to find where it had been blocked for some other farmer's use. Once discovered, the water flow problem was easily rectified by simply reopening a gate, but, often before reaching home, the water would have slowed to a trickle again as yet another farmer tried to water his crops. The Bandimere children all had jobs on the farm, including irrigation ditch duty, for which they wore old army boots! Seeing a landowner walking the ditch in tall rubber boots, shovel in hand, was a common sight until the early 1960s throughout Wheat Ridge, Fairmount and Arvada.

Horace Bandimere sold "Appleridge Estates" to Mountain States Development Company in 1964, but retained his valuable irrigation tract for more than another decade. Jimmy Go, S.K. Sung, and Liberty Investment bought pieces of land from Mountain States Development and from the Bandimere family during the 1970s.

Jimmy Go, christened as Go Puan Seng, received an honorary Doctor of Human Letters degree in 1973 from Indiana Christian University. He was the publisher of *The Fookien Times* and an internationally known Rotarian. Jimmy Go and his family escaped capture by the Japanese in the Philippines during World War II.

Flood records from the time of the earliest homesteaders in the Arvada area indicate chronic spring floods along the Ralston Valley, including the course of Van Bibber Creek. The city grew slowly for the next few decades, but Arvada entered its first growth spurt during the 1960s, with new housing rapidly spreading westward. In 1965 and again in 1969 Arvada experienced unusually severe flooding, particularly in the areas of this new housing.

Although Arvada has never experienced a 100-year flood, concerns about the danger grew. In 1973 the City of Arvada, the Urban Drainage and Flood Control District and Jefferson County began planning to build the Van Bibber Creek Flood Control Dam, a \$3 million dam project capable of stopping a 100-year flood. The proposed dam would be 25-30 feet in height, and cause flood waters to back up on a 100-acre area.

In March, 1976, Jefferson County and the City of Arvada shared equally the \$497,925 cost of purchasing 92 acres of what would become Van Bibber Park. A feasibility study for the proposed flood control dam was scheduled, to be completed in April, 1980. In the meantime, haying of Horace Bandimere's hay meadow continued.

The dam feasibility study was completed in January 1983, and Urban Drainage concluded it would not be economically justifiable to construct the Van Bibber Detention Facility. Jefferson County Open Space purchased the Van Bibber Park property on January 26, 1978.

Horace Bandimere died in June, 2003, after a long illness.