

“THE ELMS” HISTORY OF THE J H GLASSEY FARM—FT MORGAN CO

George Glassey (my great grandfather) and wife Mary came to Colorado from Ireland in 1869 with the promise of a job working for Colonel Archer, manager of the Earl of Dunraven’s ranch holdings. Three sons shortly followed him. John Henry, Robert, and Charles. They were



teenagers, Colorado was a territory, and it was open range country. The boys, all excellent horsemen, soon joined various ranching outfits, John Henry with the Wilson spread, and began a decade as drovers/cowboys--driving cattle up from Texas to the booming Denver and on to Wyoming and frequently east to Nebraska where they could be shipped by rail. These were exciting times for teenagers-- Indians, outlaws, and living “rough”. John Henry later recalled being surrounded by a band Utes with rifles who demanded his grey stallion or his life. After heated discussion John turned and slowly rode away, hearing later that the Utes had great respect for any man who would risk his life for his horse.

The advent of barbed wire and settlers brought the Open Range to a sad end in the 1880s...at least for the Glassey boys as they were left without work. John, having driven cattle to the East, knew the fertile land along the Platte--few trees but tall grass, and joined in the pioneering work of building canals for that life blood of Fort Morgan: water. John Henry and his brothers, living on beans and hardtack, used teams of horses pulling slips, scrapers, and fresnos to help construct the Upper Platte and Beaver and other “ditches”.



In 1883 John Henry homesteaded with a “tree claim” and, joined by his father and brothers, the Glasseys soon had a few miles of holdings extending east of Ft Morgan and down to the Platte.

Over the next few decades John Henry became a consummate farmer/rancher. He developed a herd of registered Shorthorns to increase beef production compared to the more common



Texas Longhorns. He developed a rigorous crop rotation plan, essential in those days before commercial fertilizers. He constructed extensive irrigation ditches and flumes for efficient distribution. He built extensive fenced “lanes” so that one man could bring cattle from the river bottom pasture up to the yard every night as Indians and rustlers were still a danger. His first love remained horses.

He bred and trained fine saddle horses, cutting horses, driving teams, and draft horses. He rode until his 80s. The original stable still exists with 10 stalls, mangers, and a pulley system to lower the heavy harness onto the draft horses. He loved branding time and was skilled with a rope and cutting horse. The Glassey brand “8” was used from the 1870s on.



After marrying Nell in 1892, John built a home which, after three expansions, is still the basis for the current home. This began one of his great enthusiasms—to create a “little corner of Ireland” by planting trees around the homestead. To accomplish this he constructed a series of level and bermed “yards” covering 2+ acres around the farmstead which could be irrigated by ditch water without endangering house or buildings. He planted a large groves of trees surrounding the parklike lawn which still keeps the house cool in summer. The name of John Henry’s farm, “The Elms” came from this endeavor and the irrigation system still works.

Another interesting historical feature is the “labor house”. In the early 1900s farming was very labor intensive and John Henry built a three room house initially for emigrant Russian-Germans arriving in Ft Morgan. This unique in-line house with running water and deluxe outhouse still stands.

The river bottom pasture with its tall native grass served as the basis for John Henry’s cattle operation but also as the family’s playground. The year-round stream flowing the complete length of the pasture was the scene of frequent picnics, fishing, and wading. In 1926 John Henry established the Glassey Gun Club with around 2 dozen paid members devoted to the excellent duck and goose hunting.



After John Henry died in 1943, his daughters continued to operate the farm. The Glassey farm has been awarded “Centennial” status from the State of Colorado —one hundred years with the same family, and in 1989 as a part of the Morgan County Centennial, the oldest farm/ranch in the County with same continuous family.

After 133 years, the current owners are brothers Steve and Tim Glassey—grandsons of John Henry Glassey.

Steve Glassey 1/16/2016