

A Landscape Puzzle Solved

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Introductory note:

Nestled at the foot of Pikes Peak, *Rock Ledge Ranch Historic Site* is a living history farm and museum. The site illustrates four distinct periods of settlement on the property; American Indian life between 1755 and 1835, the 1860s Galloway homestead, 1880s Chambers farm, and the 1907 Palmer Estate. Operated by the Colorado Springs Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Services Department, the historic site is adjacent to the national natural landmark *Garden of the Gods*.

On August 10, 1871 Walter Galloway claimed 160 acres of land in the Camp Creek Valley. This land lay immediately adjacent to an area that nineteenth century author, Helen Hunt Jackson called "a supernatural catastrophe." In her poetic way she was referring to, of course, the land we know as Garden of the Gods Park, in Colorado Springs. Before this garden stretched 11,000 acres of prime grassland of which Galloway's claim was only a small part. Today's Rock Ledge Ranch Historic Site encompasses 277 acres in this valley. Many park visitors are surprised to learn that the historic boundaries of Galloway's homestead do not align with the present park boundaries. I set out to determine where Galloway's claim, and subsequently the Chambers farm, lay in relation to the present Site boundaries and landmarks in the Camp Creek Valley. My first task was to briefly review United States land policy and modern mapping techniques.

The United States government established the General Land Office in April 1812 in an effort to deal with the far-flung millions of acres of the recently acquired Louisiana Purchase. Because the federal government was land rich and cash poor it needed an organized way to deal with its vast territories in order to sell, or in some other way redistribute land ownership from federal to private ownership. The GLO established a plan of rectangular surveys of the public lands dividing the landscape into ranges, townships, and sections to avoid the irregular, badly marked, and often conflicting plot lines of the organized surveys of colonial times.

All public land had to be surveyed, slowly, incrementally, and precisely, dividing it into rectangular segments like a giant checkerboard. This grid of measurements superimposed on the landscape is based on the acre. An acre, you may know, is a measurement of land equal to 43,560 square feet. So, each township is made up of thirty-six sections and each section contains 360 acres in a one-mile by one mile square. In 1862 the federal government passed the Homestead Act, one of many land acts designed to liberalize the transfer of land from the government to private ownership and to protect against land speculation. The Act says that it was designed "to secure homesteads to actual settlers on the public domain." Simply stated, it stipulated that any person who was the head of a family, or who was twenty-one years old and a citizen of the United States, may enter a claim on one quarter-section of public land, reside upon or cultivate the land for five years, and receive title to the land. Thus, homestead claims were 160 acres of land. By examining land documents we know that the land claimed by Walter Galloway in the Camp Creek Valley was not completely surveyed until May 1871 and that Galloway did not register his claim until August 10, 1871. But where exactly was this claim?

The government survey established the legal description of the land and this is still how land is specified today. Galloway's claim, and of course Chambers' land title for the same parcel reads: "Southeast quarter of section 34 in township 13 south of range 67 west in the 6th Principal Meridian, containing 160 acres." With this description in hand I visited Scott Thompson-Buchanan, GIS analyst for the city's Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Services Department.

Scott uses the geographic information system (GIS) to manage land records, map parkland, trails, recreation features, and acquisitions for the department. Armed with the legal description for the homestead land, I went to him with my question. He patiently explained to me that GIS is the system that allows us to look at digitized map information spatially. He told me that back in 1989 the Colorado Springs Utilities Department made overlapping aerial photos of the entire city to build an accurate inventory of all of their services. To these aerial photos they added the locations of streets, curbs, sidewalks, alleys etc. and created a base map of Colorado Springs. Scott reminded me not to confuse GIS with GPS (Global Positioning System). GPS is a separate system using satellites and electronic locators. The GIS base map created by the Utilities Department can be digitized so that the township and range grid marks can be overlaid onto it. Topographic markings indicating elevations such as ridges and creeks are also overlaid. Perched in front of Scott's computer I watched as he added overlay to overlay of a map of the Camp Creek Valley. When he did this we could plainly see the southeast quarter of section 34 as it relates to current Park boundaries, Camp Creek, and the basins and hog backs of the Valley. Because Scott had already mapped all of the structures, trails, and roads of the Garden of the Gods Park and Rock Ledge Ranch we could easily discern the land once owned by both Galloway and Chambers. I was surprised by what I saw.

The northern property line of the original homestead is south of Gateway Road, the east entrance to the Park. In fact, it is *18 feet south* of the log cabin we use to interpret Walter Galloway's 1860s home! Galloway's property extended westward into the Garden of the Gods almost to Ridge Road, including the hog back ridges behind the current barn and the natural basin which once served as an irrigation reservoir for Chambers, Palmer, and other twentieth century owners of the property. It included Camp Creek to the east. To the south there are over 150 private homes on what would have been the southeast quadrant of the homestead parcel. Galloway's southern boundary line extends into the neighborhood bordering the Ranch beyond Dent Circle. This land now filled with houses served as hay land for Chambers and Palmer and as natural pasture for Galloway and the Ute people before him.

To understand why the current Historic Site boundaries do not match the original 160-acre homestead, it helps to understand some of the changes that occurred to the parcel from 1871 to present. Over time, the original 160-acre parcel was added to by General Palmer and divided and sold as smaller parcels by later owners. (In fact, it is extremely rare to find an intact parcel based on the original government land surveys in an urban area.) In the 1960s, Egmont Vrooman acquired several hundred acres in the Valley including the land where the Historic Site now sits. Mr. Vrooman subdivided the area for houses, and intended to build a neighborhood up to Gateway Road. The area south of the Historic Site, where the 150 homes now stand, is part this subdivision.

At this time a group of citizens concerned with preserving open space as a buffer for the Garden of the Gods encouraged the city of Colorado Springs to purchase the remaining

undeveloped land. With help from local charitable foundations they raised the necessary money. By 1969 the city had purchased several parcels of land from Mr. Vrooman and these parcels make up the present Rock Ledge Ranch Historic Site boundaries. An additional benefit of this negotiation was that the Vrooman family, who loved their home at the White House Ranch as it was then known, became supporters of the historic preservation efforts. Mrs. Vrooman received the first Lifetime Membership in the Living History Association.

So the next time you visit the Ranch stand at the 1860s cabin and turn your gaze south. You will be looking at what was in turn, the Galloway homestead claim, the Chambers' Rock Ledge Ranch, and the southern portion of the Palmer Estate.