



# From this valley the Old West is going

Jens Christensen  
Photo by Chris  
Cassatt.

A way of life is disappearing on Owl Creek. "You can't keep things the same forever," says rancher Jens Christiansen as he gazes over his ranchlands, still stark with winter.

There are expanses. Of land. Of the straight roadway leading to the ranch. Of the walk from the big barns to the house. The willows beside the house are a bright yellow against the whiteness of snow in all that land.

The land is now sold ... to the Mitchell Land and Development Company ... "It will probably all be subdivided some day," says Jens.

Soon the wild iris will be blooming in the meadows around the ranch house which Jens kept for his own use, along with 10 acres and the

barns.

The ranch, the Glendale Stock Farm, began as a showplace in the county. It was built in 1912 by Jack Brunton whose father was a mining engineer in Aspen. Relates Jens, "Young Brunton had been kind of wild ... he had disappeared for a couple of years and was found working as a cowboy in Wyoming. This ranch was to kind of settle him down. He had the best of everything and he raised prize Hereford cattle and prize Belgian horses.

"I came to work on the ranch as a herdsman in 1918. I took care of the prize cattle and traveled the show circuits with them ... to Texas, California and Iowa. I washed them, curled their hair, and showed them in the arenas." Ribbons won by the cattle still hang in the barn.

And in the barn hangs an oil painting, dated 1912, of Echo Grove, a blue-ribbon bull owned by the ranch. "Echo Grove was still on the ranch when I worked here ... he lived to be 21 years old."

Jens and his father bought the ranch from Brunton in 1924. His parents, Mads and Sophia Christiansen, had brought their six children from Borris, Denmark (in West Jutland).

"We left Denmark on my twelfth birthday, on the Fourth of May," says Jens. "We came to the Snowmass Valley because my mother's sister, Kate Lindvig, known as 'The Cattle Queen of Snowmass' ran her own ranch up there.

"When we came, we brought our own schoolteacher ... a niece in the family (who spoke six languages). She taught us and also gave private French lessons to many residents. She eventually returned to Denmark and married a Baron.

"My father rented a ranch up Snowmass for a few years," explains Jens. "Then we moved over and rented half of this ranch ... from 1918 until 1924 when we bought it." Jens and his father ran the ranch with two hired hands. "We bought the ranch with the yearlings of the cattle and the Belgian horses.

"Brunton had paid \$25,000 in 1918 for just one of the horses, a grand champion stallion. His name was Imp and he weighed a ton. His huge work collar still hangs in the barn for he earned his keep by pulling all the farm machinery.

"We had five teams, including two four-horse teams and some single teams. There were a Bay team, May and Midges; a Sorrel team, Pet

and Ruth; and another stallion named Rowdy.

"When the teams were working hard, we fed them hay with oats which we grew ourselves. We always had 600 acres in hay. And we threshed our own grain ... mostly the oats and some wheat for the chickens.

"The haying went on all summer ... from the first field that was ready about July 20 until September. We hayed whenever the sun shone and sold much horse hay ... hauling it to Aspen in the wagons and sending it off by train."

Christiansen didn't mechanize or buy his first tractor until 1944. He eventually had five tractors. "We kept the teams of horses though, until they just got old and died.

"We raised our own colts for the teams and for our Morgan saddle horses." To show how many horses there were ... there are 24 two-horse stalls in the barn.

"Our saddle horses we rode on the range. During the winters, we fed the cattle here on the ranch. Then we took them up to the high-country government ranges in the summers. We used to run 300 head of cattle. I ran some up Snowmass by myself, on Brush Creek I shared range with Johnny Hoaglund, Evan Melton and Bob Sinclair.

"Up Castle Creek, I shared range with Cecil Lowderback, Milo Carroll, and Martha and Delbert Copley. We rode range a lot ... keeping the herds moving, and packing up salt blocks for the cattle. It took about eight pounds of salt per head per season.

"We would have a round-up in the fall and cut out our own cattle ... usually took a week. When the storms came, those cows were glad to see us and usually came along easy. We would usually only have to hunt out a few frisky yearlings.

"Each cow was branded with our brand. We did branding twice a year, in the spring and again in fall, as some calves were born during the summer."

Each ranch had its own medicine room in the barn. "There was no veterinary back then and we did our own doctoring. We had to rope the animals and bring them into the barn. Calves often got pneumonia ... we gave them sulfa and penicillin. We had louse powder for when they got lousy. They had to be vaccinated for black leg every season. In the spring we were busy with calving. We would bring into the

barn the cows that looked about to calve ... about seven or eight every night would have their calves.

"We had our own forge and blacksmith shop, shoeing our own horses. In winters you had to weld sharp points on the shoes so the horses could hold on ice. We repaired all our own machinery ... the sleighs, wagons, haying outfits, threshing machines and potato digger.

"We raised potatoes as a sale crop. Every fall we had a crew of about eight boys who picked potatoes and lived in the bunk rooms above the barn." Their names are still written on the walls ... Frank Garrish, Russ Holmes, Adolph Miklich and Julio Caparrella (dated 1936 and 1938).

"When we threshed, all the neighbors would come to help and my wife, Gladyce, and mother, Sophia, would cook meals for about 20 men.

"In the winters we would use our sleighs to drive into Aspen. We had a four-horse team for the double seater sleigh and also had a single-seater sleigh ... complete with sleigh bells and a cowhide to keep warm."

Jens liked to hook up his team and go into town to the dances. "There were dances in the Armory Hall for every occasion ... Christmas, New Year's, St. Patrick's Day, the Firemen's Ball. The Armory had the best floor on the Western Slope."

Once in 1925, Jens held a big dance in the loft of his barn. "We even swung a piano up through the hay window." But with bootlegging and fear of fire ("we had a hose ready all night"), Jens decided not to have any more barn dances.

His ranch typifies the Old West ... many of the Marlboro ads seen in national magazines and on TV have been photographed there.

"It was the way of life that I loved," says Jens. "You are your own boss even though you may work 16 hours a day. Cattle have to be fed every day ... and sometimes when riding the range, you feel like you are frozen solid. But ... you are free."

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