

## Timberon History

The community of Timberon is the most recent addition to an area rich in history. Little is known of what the Indians and Spaniards contributed to this particular part of the Sacramento Mountains, so we will concentrate on the Anglo history, which is fairly well documented.

The earliest recorded history concerning the Timberon area was in 1886 when C.B. Bruton was running cattle in the valley as the Sacramento River and Cattle Company. Bruton had 200 head and was managing another 800 head for Fritzgerald Moore. Moore was a former Civil War surgeon that lived in El Paso. This arrangement didn't last for long, as Bruton was arrested and tried for murder in 1889. It is unclear if he was found guilty of the crime, but evidently his attorneys ended up with all Bruton's cattle and other assets of the Company.

In 1890, it appears that a partnership was formed between Oliver Lee, Fritzgerald Moore, and a man named Shackelford. They called themselves the Sacramento Cattle Company. This is the only mention of Shackelford, but Moore remained in partnership with Lee for several years. Fritzgerald Moore eventually sold his interest to Oliver Lee.

During this time Oliver Lee was busy doing what he did best, improving the land, the water, and ranching. Lee bought property and water rights all up and down the Sacramento River. Some of the families he bought out were Virden, Danley, Meyer, etc... What about Scott Able Canyon, you may ask, wasn't that named after someone? The answer is yes, but it seems Scott Able was a very early settler that had already come and gone before most of the others even got here.

In 1897, Oliver Lee started construction on a ditch that went from the Sacramento River, ran behind where the big white ranch house is today, winding all through present-day Timberon and down Grapevine Canyon. Where the ditch ran through Arkansas Ridge it was roughly 20 feet wide and 20 feet deep. Water flowed 30 miles down this ditch to empty into what was called the Upper and Lower Juniper Reservoirs at the bottom of Grapevine Canyon, watering cattle and crops along the way. The ditch was finished around 1905 and the smelting company in Oro Grande (there was mining there then) ran a pipe up to the reservoirs. Oliver Lee supplied Oro Grande with approximately 3 million gallons of water a day during the years the smelting company was in operation. Lee received \$25,000 from the plant for this water. Later the railroad used the water, and today the community of Oro Grande uses a form of this same system to get their water.

The Lee family had moved from their Dog Canyon ranch onto the Sacramento River in the early 1900s. The family stayed in a small cabin a little ways up the river while they worked on the big ranch house. The ranch house as you see it today was finished in 1908. The only road into the area ran by the ranch house and through the big red barn, also still standing, controlling access to the valley.

Oliver Lee appeared to be very fond of apples and pears. Trees were planted everywhere up and down the valley. The big orchard was located where the airstrip is today, and you can still find a tree here and there around the ranch house and in Timberon. Oliver Lee had a cider mill down at the end of the big orchard, about where the Timberon Chapel is now. There are also some trees still up by Carrisa Springs.

Lee acquired the water rights to the springs in 1908 from J.N. Daugherty. At that time the springs were known as Daugherty Well.

The Circle Cross Cattle Company was formed by Oliver Lee in 1916 with a number of investors and Lee as executive vice-president. Around 1926, Oliver Lee combined the assets of his Sacramento Cattle Company with the Circle Cross Cattle Company receiving \$400,000 in the deal. At its height, the Circle Cross covered around 1 million acres and stretched from Tularosa in the North to around Van Horn in the South. This included a major portion of the Sacramento Mountains.

The Circle Cross folded around 1929 in the big drought. Bankers in El Paso, holding a major interest in the company, appointed Lee to sell off the assets of the Circle Cross. It seems that Oliver Lee held on to the ranch during the next several years, as there are no other owners of to be found.

Doc Womack out of Carlsbad bought the ranch, now called the Circle Cross, in the late 1930s. He held it for awhile and sold out to Dean Stalman, a pecan grower out of Las Cruces. Stalman didn't keep it but a year or two before selling to Judge Paul Moss of Odessa, Texas.

Judge Moss had discovered the Sacramento Mountains around 1935 and began taking his family to the Weed area for the summer. On one of these trips the Judge bought the old Grisak homestead in Monument Canyon, above Carrisa Springs where the Holcomb ranch is today. This was to be the Moss Family summer home. Moss arranged for a man named John Wingfield to take care of the property for him. Another Grisak homestead of interest is the chimney and foundation that can be seen on the side of the road as you drive below Timberon through the Southern Cross Ranch (now called the Elkhorn). Pete Grisak's son and his wife homesteaded there until moving, due to the lack of water in the area. You see, historically, the Sacramento River didn't flow that far down. Those years it did flow down there (mostly during the 1980s) was sort of a fluke and surprised many of the old-timers.

The Judge fixed up the house so as to be more comfortable for the wife and kids. They piped water into the house from a small spring on the steep side of the mountain, put in a bathtub, cooking stove, etc... They got their mail at the Sacramento Post Office from a Mr. and Mrs. Rastus Robertson. Mr. Robertson was also a carpenter and was busy building a summer camp for the people of the Methodist Church during this time.

Judge Moss usually came into what he called his "base camp" above where Timberon now is by going through Weed, up Perk Canyon, over into Bluewater Canyon and into Chilcoote Canyon, then through Monument Canyon.

Even after buying the Circle Cross, the Judge still oversaw the property from the "base camp" up above Carrisa Spring. His brother, John, looked after the ranch for him for about eight years while living in a place he built just below the Judge's place up the canyon. During this time they ran cattle and goats on the property.

Right after World War II they built the lodge building (Now the Community Center). The lodge was made from logs of ponderosa pines which were cut at a sawmill located near the site of today's maintenance barn on Edgewood Drive in Arkansas Canyon. He built a dam behind the lodge building to form what became the current fishing lakes and had two wells drilled to pump water into the lakes.

The sawmill used to create the lodge was run by Jim Peters. In the latter part of August, 1952, a fire started at the mill and spread quickly across the valley, resulting in the large amount of burned-over terrain extending from about a half mile Southwest of the maintenance shop all the way to the mountain top (Jim Jeffries Peak) east of Carrisa Springs. It is said that the fire just burned and burned until it finally ran out of fuel.

The Judge had an airstrip built in the valley where small, light planes could land and take off, and was in the process of building a road that went by Chalk Hill (Rim Tank) towards El Paso when the military took over that area and ended construction.

In 1948, the Judge turned over the running of the ranch to his son, William. William at one time was married to the former child star Jane Withers, who spent some time at the ranch.

After the death of Judge Moss, the land was purchased from his heirs by Willie Farah of El Paso. Farah had a substantial interest in aviation and lost no time in enlarging the airstrip here.

In March of 1969, about 9,000 plus acres (a portion) of the Circle Cross Ranch was sold by Farah to a group of businessmen, headed by Johnny Mobley, who formed the corporation known as North American Land Developments. The name of Timberon for this development was chosen by Johnny Mobley during an informal business discussion in July, 1969.

In October, 1969, the Sacramento Mountain Property Owners Association was formed. The name was officially changed to the Timberon Property Owners Association (TPOA) in the late 1970's. Richard Sparks was the first elected president of TPOA. North American Land Development deeded the lodge and the surrounding 18 acres to TPOA in March of 1975. Due to tax law considerations concerning tax exempt status, the Timberon Protective Association (TPA) was formed in July of 1983 to handle the architectural control and security functions that had formerly been handled by TPOA.

The first electric service was run to the development of Timberon in the Summer of 1971 by the Otero County Electric Cooperative.

The Timberon Fire Department was organized in October, 1974, by J. I. (Joe) Fetters. The department was certified by the State of New Mexico in January of 1976. TPOA furnished the funds necessary for the initial purchase of equipment. The first fire truck, a 1951 Chevrolet/Howe was bought from Jal, New Mexico, fire department. A three-bay fire station was started during the latter part of 1981 and building was completed at the beginning of 1982. The Emergency Medical Service (EMS) was formed within the fire department in February of 1982, following an intensive course of instruction provided by the New Mexico School of Medicine.

Frank Wheeler, Timberon's first pastor, began his work here in 1975. His ministry involved bible study groups at the developer's sales office. This activity continued until it was moved to the lodge building in 1977. Construction of the Timberon Chapel was completed in May of 1979 with a dedication and the first worship service. In June of 1981 the Timberon Memorial Park Association (cemetery) was formed on two acres next to the Timberon Chapel. The first to be buried there was William J. Whitesell, Vice President of North American Land Developments, in May of 1983. In the late 1990s the cemetery was taken over by the Timberon Water District.

In December, 1974, the U.S. Postal Service approved mail delivery to the lodge in Timberon. Prior to this, Timberon residents had to go to the Sunspot post office for their mail. In October, 1981, Don and Ruby Roberts were awarded the Community Post Office contract. The present Zip Code (88350) went into effect September 14, 1984.

In the Fall of 1979, Timberon Precinct #18 was established by Otero County. The first election was held here on June 3, 1980, with 60 registered voters.

A three-month elementary school for the winter months was established by the Alamogordo School District here on December 1, 1980. A full time elementary school became a reality in August of 1983. The first teachers at the school were Pat and Duane Carr. The school was later taken into the Cloudcroft School District and eventually closed in the year 2000 with a promise to reopen it if enrollment became sufficient to justify it.

Telephone service was brought to Timberon in October of 1981 by Dell Telephone Cooperative. The only telephone service available before that was a radio/telephone unit located first at the lodge and later at the sales office.

The Timberon Water and Sanitation District (TWSD) was formed in March of 1990. The first board members were Richard Moore, Victor Hollrah and Hugh Ellison.

The Timberon Protective Association (TPA) went under in 1991 after a bloody court battle concerning the restrictive covenants. The Timberon Property Owners Association, reeling from the legal expenses of TPA and a drop in revenue, was disbanded on November 19, 1993.

TWSD acquired the water system on August 6, 1993. TWSD currently owns and maintains the fishing lakes, golf course, airstrip (gave to County), cemetery, swimming pool, lodge complex, etc... having taken over all facilities from the old Property Owners Association.

*This history was made possible through information from Noel Akers, Dorsey Bonnell, Bill Berkebile and the book "Rough and Tumble" by Judge Paul Moss.*

*Noel Akers, of Weed, used to herd goats where Timberon is today and helped build the lodge building for Judge Moss.*

*Dorsey Bonnell, of High Rolls, is a good friend and quite a historian of the Oliver Lee family. If you ever want to find out the facts, and that is all Dorsey deals in, about Oliver Lee and his exploits - he is the one to see. You may find that most of the stories told today are just spectacular fiction, but the truth is just as fascinating.*

*Bill Berkebile was a great patriarch of the Timberon community and originally put together much of the later history in this article.*

*This history does not extend to present day Timberon – any required updates will be added soon.*