

The Frawley Ranch: a National Historic Landmark

F.R. Gartner

The Frawley family, of Lawrence County, South Dakota was honored September 24, 1977, when the Frawley Ranch was officially designated as a National Historic Landmark. Located in picturesque Centennial Valley, at the base of the northern Black Hills, the ranch has been the site of range tours, student class tours, historic tours, and has been used by many others for a variety of educational and recreation purposes. Hank Frawley, Jr. manages the family ranch which was started by his grandfather, Henry Frawley I, in the late 1800's.

The Historical Landmark Program, directed by the United States Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, is designed to identify and encourage the preservation of sites and buildings of national historic significance. The Frawley Ranch was initially accepted in 1974 on the National Register of Historic Places. Nearly 30,000 sites in the United States are on this register and on the list of National Historical Landmarks. Only about 1,400 areas have been officially designated as National Historic Landmarks.

Lands, buildings and archeological sites on the National Historic Landmark list have been accorded a significant honor. They also may obtain certain services from the National Park Service, such as technical advice to maintain historic structures and legal advice to protect property. Sites on the National Register are afforded a mechanism for protection from encroachment by proposed changes in land use, especially where federal dollars are involved.

Historical Setting

Lawrence County was created by an act of the Dakota Territory Legislature in 1875. Gold was discovered near the present city of Deadwood in the fall of that year. For about the next three decades the area in and around Deadwood, and its sister city Lead, was one of the fastest growing areas in the Northwest. "Gold fever" lured people from throughout the world.

The population of Lawrence County peaked at 19,694 in 1910 (Meland 1979). Miners, loggers, homesteaders and others intensively used not only many of the nonrenewable natural resources, but also harvested vast amounts of renewable natural resources such as timber, range vegetation, wildlife, and water. The pine forests of the Black Hills made possible the rapid development of gold mines and the building of towns and railroads (Duthie 1928). Duthie (1930) stated that forest destruction [sic] began with the settlement

of the Hills. (Rather than being destroyed by the impact of man, the ponderosa pine forests of the Black Hills have a greater density now than when first explored by Gen. Custer in 1874; see Progulske 1974). Duthie (1930) added that there was no apparent need for conservation of the resources or for care with fire: "the carelessness and mischievousness of man" replaced lightning as the principal cause of forest destruction [sic]. The impact of mining and associated activities was chiefly centered in southern Lawrence County, but also occurred throughout the Black Hills.

In order to conserve the timber supply, President Grover Cleveland in 1897 created the Black Hills Forest Reserve (now the National Forest) with headquarters in Deadwood. The first sale of stumpage from a National Forest was made to Homestake Mining Company in 1898, marking the beginning of federal forestry in the United States (Duthie 1928).

Following a few decades of gold fever, the population of Lawrence County decreased rather drastically. The homestead era followed, its impact greatest in the northern portions of the county outside the Black Hills where lands were more suitable for intensive agriculture. The population of the county in 1970 was estimated at 17,453, a drop of 11.4 percent from the 1910 figure (Business Research Bureau 1972). Between 1930 and 1969, the number of farms in Lawrence County dropped from 411 to 263, and average farm size increased from 361 to 978 acres (Business Research Bureau 1972).

The Frawley Ranch

The history of development of the Frawley Ranch portrays the development of much of the West. The original historical survey for the National Historic Landmark Program noted that the Frawley Ranch "is a living illustration of the failure of the 160-acre homestead concept on land ill-suited for farming." The history of the ranch is actually the history of several ranches, homesteads and roadhouses. Seventeen separate homesteads were at one time located on the ranch which is now divided into upper, middle, lower and east ranches.

In 1877, an aspiring young lawyer, Henry Frawley I, arrived in Deadwood from Wisconsin with his law degree. His interests included agriculture and, in a few years, he acquired land in Centennial Valley. In 1890, he married Christiana Anderson, daughter of a prominent Centennial Valley dairyman and state legislator who owned what is now called the east ranch. The Frawley and Anderson Ranches were managed separately until the death of Henry Frawley I. However, that marriage ultimately marked the beginning of the consolidation of various ranches and homesteads in Centennial

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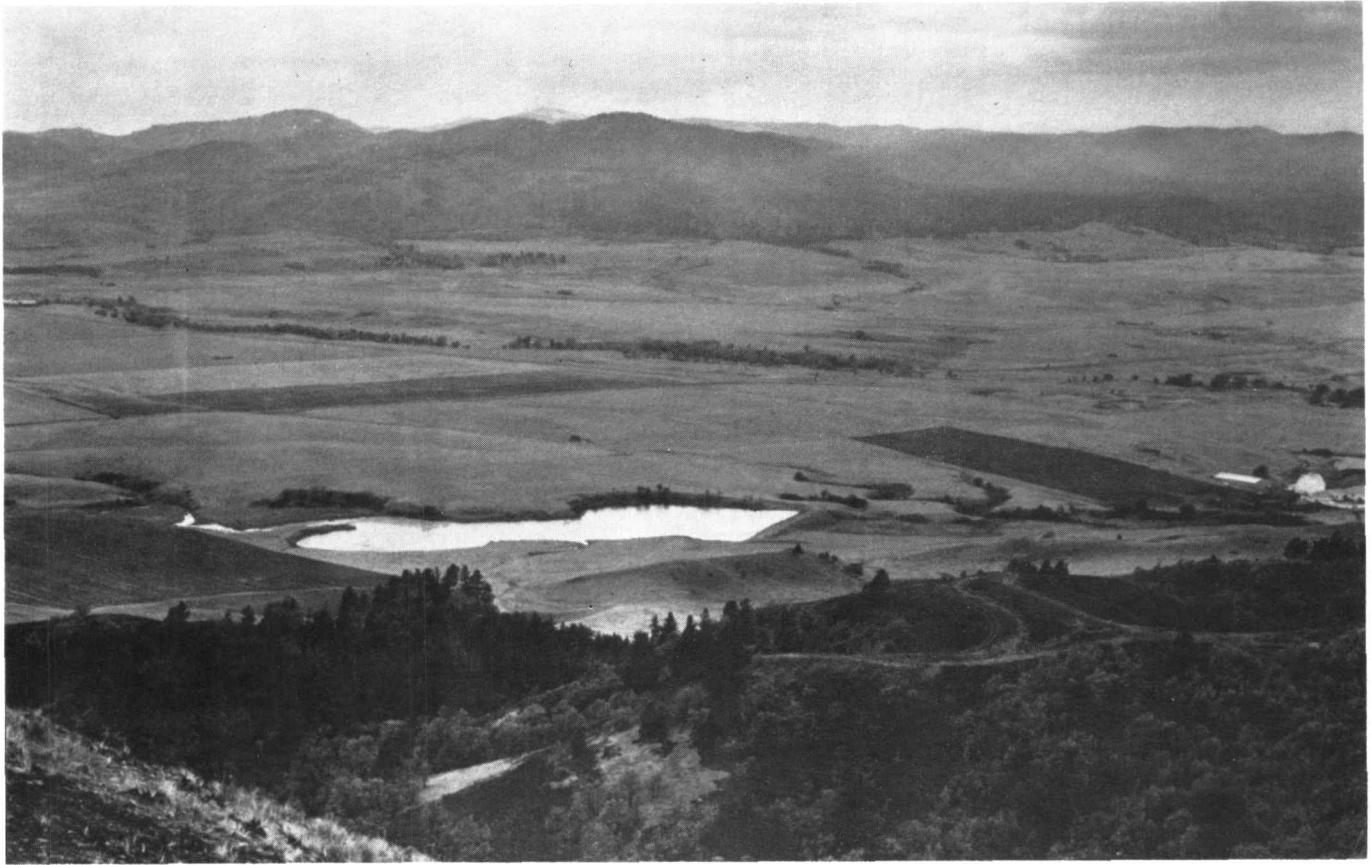


Photo by F.R. Gartner

Centennial Valley and part of the Frawley Ranch viewed to the southwest from Elkhorn Peak (elevation 4520 ft.), a prominent local landmark near the center of the ranch. The northern Black Hills are seen in the background.

Valley by Henry's son, Henry J., Sr., and more recently by Henry J., Jr. (Hank). The original buildings of the dairy operation were wooden structures. They were later replaced by a sandstone barn, a cottage home, and a spring house.

The Centennial Park Hotel and post office originally occupied part of what is now called the upper ranch. Fire destroyed the buildings in 1883, and the area was subsequently used for livestock grazing.

Another two story hotel and eating establishment was built by Anna and Marion Draper in 1888 on land that is now the middle ranch. This building served as a stagecoach and wagon stop on the route over which mining supplies, food, and other items were transported to the rapidly growing mining communities around Deadwood and Lead.

The stagecoach stop and adjoining acreage was purchased by the Frawley family in 1912. In recent years, Hank remodeled the hotel so it could become the family residence. Much of the finished lumber used on the inside was cut from bur oak growing on the ranch. This historic building recently became the ranch headquarters and home for Hank and his wife, Molly, son Michael, and Hank's father, Henry J. Frawley, Sr., who celebrated his 90th birthday on November 25, 1981.

The growth of the Frawley Ranch to its present 4,750 acres was made possible by the acquisition of unsuccessful homesteads and the application of suitable uses to the natural and economic environment. According to the South Dakota State Historical Preservation Center, "The ranch encompasses visually and historically the procession of

western rural life from the American Indian through homesteaders to the large ranch. The site is also testimony to the success of one family where many others had failed."

Description of the Area

Elevations on the Frawley Ranch vary from about 3,800 ft, a few miles north of ranch headquarters, to 4,520 ft at the top of Elkhorn Peak (a prominent local landmark). Much of the south end of the ranch is located in a portion of Centennial Valley (Centennial Prairie on some maps). The valley lies between the outer slope of the Black Hills and the Hogback Ridge. The Hogback, a conspicuous topographic feature, forms an outer wall separate from, but nearly surrounding, the Black Hills. Throughout most of its length it is a single



Photo courtesy Rapid City Journal, Rapid City, SD

One of two stone barns on the Frawley Ranch, Spearfish, South Dakota. Courtyard style barns are one of the unique features of the historic ranch.

crested ridge, usually with a cap of rather hard sandstone, broken by many stream gaps (McIntosh 1949). Elevations of the Hogback in the vicinity of the ranch vary from about 4,200 to 4,400 ft.

Elevations in the Black Hills increase quite rapidly within a short distance of the south end of the ranch. Five miles south, the elevation at Deadwood is about 4,600 ft; 2½ miles further southwest, in Lead, elevation increases to about 5,240 ft; and about four miles southwest of Lead, at the top of Terry Peak, the elevation is 7,064 ft.

The climate in the vicinity of the Frawley Ranch differs greatly from that of higher elevations a few miles south and also differs from the climate on the plains to the north and east. Average annual precipitation at Spearfish (elevation 3,640 ft), about six miles west of the ranch, is 22.3 in. (U.S. Dep. Commerce 1980). About 70 percent occurs during the growing season, April through September. The average annual temperature at Spearfish is 46.8° F; temperatures average 24.5° F in January and 71.0° F in July. These data probably closely reflect the climate at the ranch.

Soils on the ranch are as varied as the topography. On the nearly level lands of Centennial Valley, soils are moderately deep to shallow, well drained, loamy and silty. The steep uplands frequently have rock outcrops and shallow, well-drained or excessively drained silty soils. A more detailed description of soils and vegetation of the Hogback north of the Black Hills was provided by Thompson and Gartner (1971).

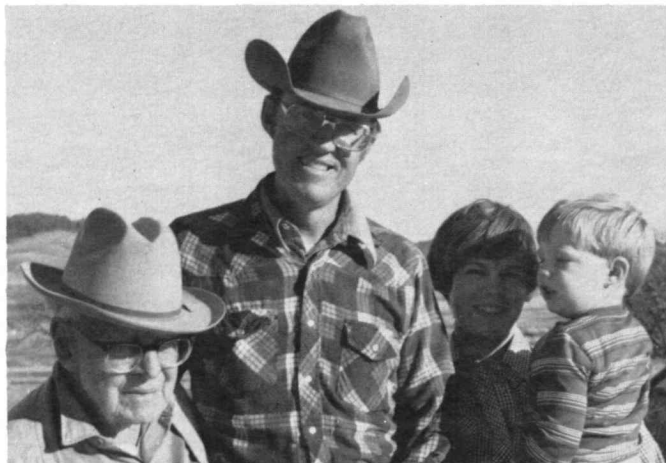
Range sites, determined by the Soil Conservation Service, include silty, sandy, thin upland, shallow, very shallow and woodland (E. McGuire, personal communication). These sites, in an average growing season, produce native vegetation yields of about 1,200 to 3,000 lb/ac on a dry weight basis.

Vegetation on the ranch is as complex as the topography and soils. McIntosh (1949) noted that "from a botanical standpoint the most important climatological difference between the Black Hills and the surrounding country lies in the fact that the Hills receive much more rainfall than the plains." The Frawley Ranch, in a transition zone between Black Hills forests and plains grasslands, is a classic outdoor laboratory for the botanist, the plant ecologist and the range scientist. Three major vegetational climaxes (i.e. grasslands, forest and scrub) within the United States are represented in the northern Black Hills (McIntosh 1930). Most range ecologists would probably prefer mountain brush or oak woodland to the term "scrub". Nevertheless, each can be found on the Frawley Ranch.



Photo courtesy Rapid City Journal, Rapid City, SD

Log cabin from the homestead era on the lower ranch has been restored in recent years by Hank Frawley.



Three generations of the Frawley family outside the family home in Centennial Valley: Henry J. Frawley, Sr. (left) with son, Hank and his wife, Molly and son, Michael.

Ponderosa pine occurs on ridges and higher elevations on the ranch. Most pine stands are of low quality, although sawlog trees can be found on favorable sites such as north slopes. Bur oak and other trees and shrubs of lesser importance comprise a shrub ecotone between coniferous forest and foothills grasslands. The oak usually occurs in shrub form, but reaches tree size on favorable sites.

Bur oak, green ash, American elm, and boxelder occur in canyons and other favorable drainageways. Frequently associated with these trees are numerous shrubs including western snowberry, chokecherry, wild plum, serviceberry, buffaloberry, and currants, to name a few.

Grassland vegetation occurs on the ranch primarily in two forms: Mixed Prairie and a form of True Prairie termed a bunchgrass subclimax by McIntosh (1930). Major grasses of the Mixed Prairie type include western wheatgrass, green needlegrass, needleandthread, prairie Junegrass, blue grama, hairy grama and buffalograss. Threadleaf and needleleaf sedges are also common. Major grasses of the True Prairie type include big bluestem, little bluestem, prairie dropseed, sideoats grama, blue grama, hairy grama, stony-hills muhly, prairie sandreed and Indiangrass. The Mixed Prairie type is composed of predominantly cool season grasses, while the True Prairie type consists of warm season grasses. Range managers and livestock producers recognize the nutritional quality, length of growing season and forage quantity afforded by this diversity of native vegetation.

Ranch Management

The Frawley Ranch is known for its historic buildings, including barns of locally quarried sandstone and limestone, a log cabin, a country school, and an old roadhouse. The ranch is also recognized by range scientists as an example of excellence in natural resource management, especially native range. Hank's grazing management plan has been aimed at maintaining productivity and vigor of the high producing native grasses on the ranch.

Prescribed burning is being planned for early 1982 in one pasture with a grazing distribution problem. Accumulations of excessive amounts of old plant materials have led to spotty utilization. Burning will be used to reduce mulch accumulations, reduce ponderosa pine encroachment, suppress Kentucky bluegrass, and stimulate native vegetation, all of which should lead to more uniform grazing use.

Some of the former cropland on the ranch has been reseeded to native grasses; other cropland is now spring/fall pasture comprised of intermediate wheatgrass and alfalfa. Hank has cooperated with South Dakota State University range and animal scientists on several research projects and demonstrations. A plant nursery, used primarily for demonstration purposes, was maintained on the ranch for more than a dozen years. He has also worked closely with the Soil Conservation Service, developing a grazing management plan within the Great Plains Conservation Program.

The Frawleys maintain a herd of about 300 cows most of which are Hereford-Angus crosses. Production records are kept on the cow herd to provide culling criteria. Calves are held over and sold as yearlings, affording flexibility in forage utilization and marketing strategy.

The entire Frawley family has been active in community affairs. Several years ago Hank was appointed as South Dakota advisor to the National Trust for Historic Preservation. He currently is a member of the Lawrence County Commission. Hank has been a speaker and master of ceremonies at several South Dakota Section SRM annual meetings and has served as a director and a committee member.

Hank Frawley is a true activist in matters affecting land use, conversion of agricultural land to other uses, and degradation of the natural resources of the northern Black Hills. As founder and president of the "Save Centennial Valley Association," his thorough research and persistence halted efforts of a large mining company and the Lead-Deadwood Sanitary District to permanently alter present and future land uses of the valley. Land had been purchased and plans initiated to construct a 290-acre combined mine and municipal waste lagoon behind a 98-ft high dam in the valley. The ensuing battle was long and costly for the Association and the Frawleys, but a valuable resource—underground water—was saved from potential pollution by chemicals used in the ore extraction process and by municipal sewage. The Association argued that the soils and underlying geologic strata, with inclusions of highly soluble gypsum, were not suitable for a waste lagoon behind a large dam. The Environmental Protection Agency originally endorsed the planned waste lagoon, but ultimately withdrew its support following months of scientific review and questioning by an expert attorney of environmental law. The mining company subsequently selected another location nearer the mine for its wastes.

Not many individuals would have had the stamina exhibited by the Frawley family in this and other legal controversies affecting natural resources. Persistence and tenacity are Frawley family traits that have enabled them to develop and maintain a working cattle ranch where others failed. Perhaps

the designation of the Frawley ranch as a National Historic Landmark is an appropriate memorial to a family who had the vision and intestinal fortitude to defy individuals, corporate giants and governmental agencies who attempted to convert agricultural land to other uses for short term economic gain.

Nomination of other western ranches, or significant historical sites within a ranch, to the National Historical Landmark Program will probably be made in the future. Several state and federal research stations would no doubt qualify as National Historical Landmarks or may be acceptable on the National Register of Historic Places. Many experiment stations were established because they represented larger areas of unique vegetation types and, therefore, provided field laboratories for both basic and applied research. Initial research of renewable natural resources in the West ignited an interest in range management, the result of which has been the field of range science and the Society for Range Management. Thus, the Society may have an obligation to endorse efforts to nominate ranches, historical range areas, and experiment stations to the National Historical Landmark Program. That designation may prevent future incursion of historically and biologically significant lands by developers, transportation planners, industries and others who might permanently alter their present uses and value to the scientific community and the general public.

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The 1857 volume on Agriculture by the U.S. Patent Office states: "It is probable that buffalo, elk, deer, etc., of the Great Plains still exceed . . . farm quadrupeds in the settled portions of the U.S. The American people, then, are about to inaugurate a new and immense order in industrial production—pastoral husbandry."

The 1859 volume on Agriculture by the U.S. Patent Office proposed domestication of the eland and has an etching of the eland as the frontispiece to the 552-page book. (The eland is now ranched in south Africa for meat and might well

have a place on brushy rangelands of Texas and portions of states to the west).

In 1862 the U.S. Department of Agriculture published the first volume in the current series of Yearbooks of Agriculture. Included in the 1862 Yearbook is a note that Linnaeus, the renowned Swede who established the binomial system of scientific nomenclature, had a century earlier reported that sheep rejected only 387 among 528 species of plants (Which might lead us to claim Carl van Linne (1707-78) as an early rangeman.)—E.J. Dyksterhuis