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Our Mountain Home: The Oscar and Emma Swett Ranch

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OUR MOUNTAIN HOME: THE OSCAR AND EMMA SWETT RANCH

by

Carolyn Toone

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE in

English

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ABSTRACT

Our Mountain Home: The Oscar and Emma Swett Ranch

By

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Utah State University, 2010

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In this thesis, I examined the lives of my great-grandparents, Oscar and Emma Swett. Oscar began a homestead in the Uinta Mountains in 1909, which he successfully ran for nearly sixty years. My grandmother was born on the ranch, and my own father spent much of his time there. I look at how land policy changed from encouraging ranching and farming in the early 1900’s to tourism and recreation in the 1960’s, with the coming of the Flaming Gorge Dam. The lives of my great-grandparents and their children were shaped by these changes and they felt the consequences of the shifting values of the Forest Service and government.

I used many primary documents in my research, from interviews given by the Swett children to photographs and documents. I also drew from literature and research by other western authors, such as Wallace Stegner, Mary Clearman Blew, and Steve Trimble. I connected my personal and family stories and memories with the larger framework of land policy in the West and the culture of ranching families similar to my own family. This enabled me to show how land policy affected many individuals and families on a personal level, looking through the prism of my own family and experiences.
To my parents, Walt and Linda Toone, who provided me with a rich history to draw from and the ability to see the possibilities of the future.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I must first thank my parents, Walter and Linda Toone. Not only did my father provide me with a rich family heritage I had yet to discover, his unyielding support and belief in me through this process is what gave me the courage to take on this daunting project. My mother has also been with me every step of the way, proofreading constantly and praising continually. I never would have thought I would be able to do this thesis without their love and support.

I am also grateful to Melody Graulich who saw a thesis where I only saw a paper. She was able to see the possibilities of the Swett Ranch and my unique position to tell the story before anyone else. She is the one who pushed me to make my writing better and research stronger. This thesis would not have been possible without her.

Lastly, and possibly most importantly, I must thank my great-grandparents, Oscar and Emma Swett. The process of researching their lives has done much more than provide me with information to write about. It has helped me discover a part of myself and my heritage I didn’t know existed. I admire their work ethic and determination, but what I admire most is the lives they led and the people they touched. More important than the ranch itself are the people who were influenced by them, including my father. They provided him with the same love and support he has given me my entire life. I am profoundly grateful for the family I came from and am proud to be a descendant of Oscar and Emma Swett.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

All who come and go bring along their own context, leave their mark, however faint.

-Mary Clearman Blew

The ranch. Growing up, that simple phrase encompassed nearly everything I knew about my great-grandparents. Although nobody in my family had lived there for at least twenty years, and in fact the only people who did were strangers from other parts of the country, it seemed nearly as familiar as my home. To me, the ranch was some sort of playhouse, with elaborate decorations and a rustic setting. I didn’t have to use much imagination to pretend I was a pioneer homesteader who had to grow my own vegetables and make my own clothes.

For many years, the ranch remained my family’s personal get-away, a place for picnics, reunions, and the occasional Sunday drive. We lived in Vernal, Utah, forty miles away, until 1988, just before I turned five. Then the oil fields failed, putting most of the residents of Vernal, including my parents, out of work. My parents had owned one of the only photography studios in Vernal, my dad taking the pictures while my mom dealt with the customers. However, people weren’t interested in having pictures taken when they could barely afford food, so my parents sold their photography business, and my father began looking for another job. We loaded up our station wagon and made the trip to Hurricane, in southwestern Utah, where my dad began working on the roads and trail crew for Zion National Park. Though this was his first time working for the National Park Service, he had always spent whatever time he could outside. He had become a photographer, in part, because he loved taking pictures of everything from sweeping
landscapes to lavender flowers. My mom often complained that on family vacations he spent too much time photographing the scenery, usually failing to include his children.

My oldest sister, Kristin, was beginning her first year of college, and my other sister, Jacque, would be a freshman in high school. Though she was understandably upset at leaving her friends, she made the move without complaining too much. At six, my brother Jon was only a year older than my twin, Jeff, and me, and the three of us thought of the move as an adventure. My parents did their best not to let us know of their apprehension as they drove further away from all that was familiar and secure, into something that stretched out before them like a blank canvas. They had no idea what it would look like in the end.

Perhaps they hadn’t realized how deep their roots were in the Uintah Basin until they had to plant them somewhere else. My mom and dad had both grown up moving frequently, as their parents found different jobs and tried to establish their families over and over again. When my parents got married, they decided they didn’t want their children to experience the same instability and did their best to keep us in one place for as long as they could. However, now, because of forces they couldn’t control, they were picking up their family and doing something they had avoided so far in their marriage. As Wallace Stegner wrote: "Home is a notion that only nations of the homeless fully appreciate and only the uprooted comprehend" (Angle of Repose 159). It was when they uprooted their own children that the concept of home became more meaningful.

Though we lived eight hours away, we made the trip back to Vernal at least once a year. My grandparents were still there, as well as aunts, uncles, and cousins. Because we usually returned during the summer, it was possible to go to the ranch nearly every
time. Even if we just drove up and walked around, it was enough. When my sisters got married, we took their new husbands to the ranch to show them the old cabins and workshops. Who else had a National Historic Site they could brag about?

I always wanted to return. I looked forward to the weedy smell of the air, how it never seemed to get too hot, the sight of the white house. My favorite part was the beds, covered in patchwork quilts with placards placed on them. They looked lumpy, yet cozy and comforting. I loved the desks in the bedrooms and tried to imagine my grandmother and her sisters actually doing homework on them. However, as much as I loved seeing the things that were still on the ranch, the physical traces that hadn’t been erased, I didn’t know much about the people or the stories behind them. I only saw what was in front of me, gathering my family history from brochures and Forest Service volunteers. The ranch, the items left on it, and the stories of the people who lived there were simply a representation of a way of life I would never know, something which seemed so romantic, yet distant.

Along the way, though, I did pick up bits of the story. I knew my dad spent most of his summer vacations on the ranch and lived there for a year after he graduated from high school. I knew my parents stayed there for a short time after their marriage, while my mom was pregnant with my oldest sister, living in Louis’s cabin, about a quarter of a mile away from the ranch. She hated using the outhouse there and always worried the Swetts thought she was just a city girl. I knew there was a school close to the home, but I only knew that because my grandparents met when Hyrum, freshly graduated from college, went to the mountain to teach at that school for a year. Yet I never asked many
questions; it was enough for me that the ranch was simply there and seemed it always had been.

And, while I had difficulty imagining the land before Oscar arrived, the space where he would build his ranch had been there for much longer than the time Oscar and Emma were there. Before they laid the foundations for their first home, the land had been open and relatively empty for thousands of years, known only to the Ute and Shoshone Native Americans in that region. Later, white settlers dribbled in from the East, looking for space to spread out. Nobody stayed permanently, however, until Oscar Swett staked his claim in 1909. The Homesteading Act of 1862 made it possible for people like Oscar to own their own piece of land, and Oscar was eager to take full advantage of what the government was offering. He and the other settlers in the area worked with the Forest Service rangers to obtain permits to graze their cattle and cut timber out of the surrounding forest. The acts and policies passed by the government made their existence on the mountain possible for so many years.

However, it was another act of government, not nature, that led to the end of ranching on the Swett Ranch and hastened Oscar and Emma’s departure. When Flaming Gorge Dam was completed in the 1963, the Forest Service shifted their focus from agriculture to tourism, and little by little, whittled down Oscar’s cattle herd, leaving no room for him in the mountain home he had created. In 1968 he sold his land to a developer, who planned to turn it into a resort for the tourists coming to boat, fish, and hike.

Worried that the developer’s plans would irreversibly alter the face of the mountain, the Forest Service condemned the land and sought to purchase it. The
developer refused, and the case eventually ended up in court. At the center of a heated
debate and expensive lawsuit, the land went from being out-of-the-way and difficult to
make a living on to being in high demand and sought after by the government and
developers alike. After the land was awarded to the Forest Service, employees and
volunteers moved into the homes and began planting the gardens and restoring the
buildings and equipment. They opened the ranch up to the public, allowing thousands of
people to walk the trails, peek into the rooms, and experience what life on the mountain
was like in a not-so-distant past. In 1979, the Swett Ranch became a National Historic
Site.

Oscar and Emma’s descendants are now part of the crowd who are allowed to
visit the homes, but not to stay. We go up in the summers for a day or two, learning about
our ancestors from volunteers in the gray-and-green uniforms of the Forest Service.
Despite having spent many summer days there and knowing a few of the people who
actually lived there, I was in awe of the vast amounts of information I didn’t know about
my own family when I began research for this project. As I began unearthing the
complexities of the lives of my family members, I finally realized what my father had
been trying to tell me all along; the Swett Ranch is important to me not simply because of
what it’s become, but because of who lived there and the kind of people they were. I’ve
been discovering a part of myself I never knew existed.

Through researching and writing, I’ve been peeling back the layers, discovering
how the Swett Ranch fits into the larger framework of land use in the West and is a
representation of years of the fierce debate over public versus private lands, family
owned and operated ranches and farms versus corporations and industrialization, tradition
versus modernity, and agriculture versus tourism and recreation. In his book, *Bargaining for Eden*, Steve Trimble writes of these forces:

> Every mountain, every wild place, harbors the tensions of opposing forces, and all regions and philosophies understand this fact. Harmony and balance don’t arrive until storied heroes battle dragons for human souls. Good and evil. Yin and Yang. We must acknowledge these dichotomies and then pass beyond them. Wisdom lies in the shifting frontiers. This mountain is the fulcrum for each pair of dualities; its summit is the pivot for the morality play of the land. (153)

The story of the Swett Ranch is not linear, with a clear beginning and ending. Rather, it is a combination of all the opposing forces, shaped out of the dualities and dichotomies that encompass it. The struggle to own land, to be successful, and find a place within the ever-shifting values of the government and society played itself out here in the lives of one family.

Though remote, the Swett Ranch was not isolated but intricately intertwined with the society and culture that surrounded it. While it is a representation of living off the land and the old adage that anything is possible with hard work, its very function today as property of the U.S. Forest Service is proof of how quickly things can change. No matter how hard Oscar worked at making the ranch his own, he was still at the mercy of the government and dominant culture. Though other families, ranches, and farms were affected in similar ways, the Swett Ranch is unique in that it is still there, giving voice to itself and the other ranches and homesteads like it. In learning Oscar and Emma’s story, I am learning, at least in part, the story of the West and the forces that drove thousands of
men and women to face the unknown and carve out their own places in its landscapes, sometimes working alongside, sometimes against, the federal government. Countless stories of individuals and groups make up our West today, and my own family played a small role of their own.

This thesis, though focused on Oscar, Emma, and their children, will not simply be about them. As historian Eric Swedin wrote: “Oscar and Emma's lives can only be understood in the dual contexts of their physical and social environment” (ii). An understanding of the historical events, political acts, and cultural and social expectations of ranching life will be crucial to an understanding of Oscar and Emma and the motives behind their actions and decisions. I will look at how ordinary people, like Oscar and Emma, adapted and reacted to government policy. In addition to historical sources, I will use memoirs and books written by authors and historians such as Mary Clearman Blew, Teresa Jordan, Judy Blunt, and Mary Neth, to give insight into neighborhood and family dynamics in rural communities. Also, because the ranch itself has been preserved for the public and future generations, the lasting impact of what Oscar and Emma accomplished cannot be neglected. Though it appears constant and fixed, as the Forest Service wants it to, the ranch continues to be molded and shaped by outside forces, serving as an ever-changing reflection of the shifting values of the government and culture in which we live. I will look at the varying purposes people see in preserving the ranch and the significance it holds for individuals who experience the ranch in different ways.

Although this thesis will not only be about Oscar and Emma, it will, in part, be a study of their lives. It is necessary for me to find out who they were, what they valued, and how others viewed them, in order to write a fair and accurate account of their ranch
and the intangible legacy they left behind. A familiar weight settles on me each time I think of writing about my great grandparents. The thought of trying to reconstruct their lives, discover people who died years before I was born, and give them a place in my life today, is enough to make me feel short of breath. The words of Mary Clearman Blew sum up my anxiety: “I feel an uneasy balance between writing about the dead as their lives ‘really’ were and writing about them as a projection of my own experiences. I keep reminding myself that the times they lived in were not my times” (Bone Deep in Landscape 6). I know their times were not my times; I’m looking at the ranch two generations away, wholly unfamiliar with their way of life.

However, I don’t think that I need to have lived on a ranch or stacked hay in order to appreciate Oscar and Emma. The mark they left on the mountain is still evident, and the mark they unknowingly left on me is slowly emerging. They are the ones who make me write. And, because I realize it’s impossible for me to know everything about them and understand completely why they did the things they did, I use Stegner’s words as a guide: “You take something that is important to you, something you have brooded about. You try to see it as clearly as you can […]. All you want in the finished print is the clean statement of the lens, which is yourself, on the subject that has been absorbing your attention. Sure, it’s autobiography. Sure, it’s fiction. Either way, if you have done it right, it’s true” (Introduction Where the Bluebird Sings 227). Attempting to tell a true story I wasn’t there to see, I pull from my own reservoirs of experience, combining what I think and feel with what I’ve learned about those I never knew. However, as I write, I think they’re closer than I realize, aware of my brief appearance on the stage of their lives, contributing what little I can to the continuing drama of the Swett Ranch. I only hope
that in the end, as I tell the story of Oscar and Emma, and discover my own along the way, that it’s true.
CHAPTER II

LAND OF MANY USES

“Many uses” means that there are many users—Dyan Zaslowsky

July, 1988

“Jeff, look!” I couldn’t keep the shrillness out of my four-year-old voice as I pointed through the fence, into the trees and tall green grass. “What?” my twin brother asked, coming up behind me.

“It was a deer, and you missed it. Come on, let’s go tell Dad,” I said, trying to ease Jeff’s disappointment at not seeing the deer, “Maybe he knows where more are.”

We were spending the day on the Swett Ranch, about forty miles from our home in Vernal. It was the fiftieth wedding anniversary of our grandparents, Hyrum and Irma Toone. The ranch was a fitting location because it was here that they met fifty years earlier, when Hyrum was a handsome schoolteacher, fresh out of college and Irma a feisty young woman, who could outride and out rope most of the hired hands on the ranch. However, knowing and caring little of love and marriage, Jeff, our brother, Jon, and I were just happy to be able to go to the mountain, where we could see deer bounding by, dip our feet in the creek, and play house in the old rootcellar.

We informed our dad of our wildlife encounter. He laughed and said there were plenty more deer, and we would find one for Jeff. We spent the next hour following him around as he took us down familiar trails, pointing out buildings, like the cow barn a quarter of a mile away and the remains of the schoolhouse. Jon and Jeff found some deer, I found some flowers, and we left the ranch that day satisfied with our discoveries, things that couldn’t be found at home.
Though this was one of our first times experiencing this out-of-the-way place, where time seemed to slow down, we were in a long line of individuals and groups who had already seen the beauty of what would become the Swett Ranch. Our tiny footsteps followed the larger ones of those who, generations before us, walked the same paths and made the same discoveries.

***

The land was empty. Isolated and relatively untouched for hundreds of years, except for Native Americans who came and went, it was nobody’s permanent home. The meadows, covered in sage brush and overgrown grass, burnt by the sun in the summer and subdued by the snow in the winter, changed only with the seasons. However, as fur trappers, explorers, and settlers pierced the vastness of the West, beckoned by the call of the unknown, they made their way through the Uinta Mountains. There they laid claim to that which had been hidden, opened up what had seemed impenetrable, and allowed others to view with them the vistas that sprawled out before them.

The beautiful vistas were due in large part to the Green River, one of the most defining characteristics of the Uinta Mountains. It begins in the Wind River Range in Wyoming, then snakes toward the Colorado River. It first encounters the Uinta Mountain range, cutting through the Flaming Gorge canyon. Following the direction of the mountain range, the Green River turns east. Here Allen Creek empties into the larger river. “This creek, small and hardly noticeable, drains off of a small sloping plateau, which extends south from the Green River. This loosely-defined area is called Greendale” (Swedin 24). While the name most likely came from the Green family, some of the first settlers, the adjective of “green” certainly fits the description of the area.
Of course, the area wasn’t always known as Greendale. The first inhabitants were mostly from the Ute and Shoshone tribes. An excerpt from the Swett Ranch Management plan states, “Many other people both preceded and followed the Swetts. Evidence of earlier occupations [of Native Americans] at the ranch include rockshelters, possible prehistoric village structures, and scatters of flakes from the tool production” (3). Oscar was always interested in these artifacts, collecting and sharing the ones he found on his property. His children remember him teaching them about the Native Americans who lived there before they did. However, although the Native Americans were the first ones to live in the area, they did not stay. Rather, they camped there for short amounts of time before moving on.

When Henry Ashley, a trapper from Louisiana, organized the first fur trapper rendezvous in the area in 1825, the mountain men found an ideal place for hunting and fishing. Because the Uinta Mountain Range is the only major range on the North American continent to run east and west, the climate varies from other mountain ranges. According to an anthropological report written by William M. Purdy: “The climate along the northeast slope of the Uinta Mountains, influenced primarily by the westerly winds of this latitude and modified by the Wasatch Range and the high peaks of the western Uintas, is extremely dry. The lack of snow in winter relieved the mountain man of one of his most pressing problems, winter pasturage for his animals” (qtd. in Swedin 31). Also, because most of the wildlife in the area migrated to the Green River during the winter, the mountain men were able to obtain food with relative ease. The furtrappers mostly hunted beaver, which, by the 1840s, all beaver had been trapped out of the area, and there was little market for beaver pelt (Loosle 3). Little by little, the furtrappers left the area.
In 1869, John Wesley Powell, a name which would become synonymous with the West, led an exploring team down the Green River. On this initial trip, Powell and his team passed through the Unitas. Western historian Donald Worster writes that the first canyon Powell and his team came to they named “Flaming Gorge,” because of the “brilliant red color of its sandstone, which the evening sun seemed to set afire” (164). Powell would also name other places in the area, such as the Canyon of Lodore, and rename Brown’s Hole to Brown’s Park. Powell’s influence in this area would be long lasting not only because of the names he attached to places, but because these places helped him develop his philosophy of conservation and water use in the West. According to Worster, these expeditions made “Powell one of the most admired explorers of the century. He brought back vital knowledge of the hidden Southwest--its rivers, mountains, natural resources, and not least, the Grand Canyon. He became one of the leading interpreters of the West, an influential voice on its land and water issues” (XI). Powell and his team became among the first “tourists,” not only of the West, but of the Uinta Mountains. Among the possibilities for irrigating, farming, and ranching, he saw the raw beauty and splendor of the area, realizing this was a place to which people would naturally be drawn.

Powell recognized that the lands in the Great Basin, beyond the 100th meridian, where annual rainfall was less than twenty inches, needed a more flexible land system than what was in place in the East. He recommended that “irrigable land be classified and disposed of in small tracts of no more than eighty acres” (Gates 420). He also felt that the timbered lands “should be sold to lumbermen and woodsmen who should control them and establish fire protection.” Though Powell was “no advocate of government control
and development of these resources,” he “saw the need for cooperative management and
development of the irrigable and pasture land” (Powell 24). Powell’s attitude that the
government must maintain at least some control over the land to maximize its potential
represents the delicate balance that existed from the beginning between the desire for
citizens to have access to the land and the recognition that ultimate control lay in
Washington.

Although more and more people were discovering this little known tract of land in
the Uintas, the use of the land to hunt, fish, and winter animals continued into the end of
the nineteenth century. However, a few permanent settlers eventually appeared. A town
called Manila was formed about twenty-five miles west of what would be known as
Greendale. A smaller community named Linwood was settled about two miles away from
Manila. Most of the inhabitants, who ran small ranches or farms, were from Salt Lake,
and came to the area when a land speculator built a canal and convinced them of the
possibilities of farming and ranching (Swedin 34). Brown’s Park, about twelve miles
from Greendale, became a popular watering ground for cattle in the 1860s. Brown’s Park
itself would play a colorful role in the history of the area, becoming a notorious haven for
cattle rustlers and outlaws, such as Butch Cassidy.

As these areas, and others like them, filled with hopeful farmers and ranchers, the
government took notice of the vast amounts of open land and the citizens who were
clamoring for a piece of it. Taking to heart Thomas Jefferson’s belief that “[w]henever
there is in any country uncultivated lands and unemployed poor, it is clear that the laws
of property have been so far extended as to violate natural right. The small land holders
are the most precious part of the state” (Jefferson), the government, under the direction of
President Abraham Lincoln, approved the Homestead Act of 1862. Gifford Pinchot declared this act to be “the best and most important land law ever passed” (Breaking New Ground 80). Approved twenty-eight years before Oscar was born, this piece of legislation would allow him, and thousands of others like him, to own land, raise cattle, and fulfill what would have been an otherwise impossible dream.

The act allowed U.S. citizens to file for a tract, 160 acres, of government land. The stipulations were that they must break (plow) at least 10 acres, build a home, live on, and improve the land. At the end of five years, if the conditions were met, the citizen could file for the deed and be given ownership of the property. Alfred Runte, an environmental historian, explains, “From practically the moment of its founding, and well into the nineteenth century, the United States was indeed committed to transferring the public lands to private owners large and small. […] Here again, the object was to encourage the settlement of more distant western lands” (2). By giving the land to individuals who would work on and improve the land, the government was fulfilling two purposes. It helped those who would otherwise be unable to own land make a living and provide for themselves while settling the vast amount of government land that was in the West.

In “The Homestead Act: Free Land Policy in Operation,” Paul Gates, a land policy historian, wrote of the double interest the government had in providing land to homesteaders: “Since it was the investment of the farmer’s labor and the public’s money that made land valuable, it seemed to the western citizen double taxation to make him pay for government land. The Homestead Act was intended to reward him for his courageous move to the frontier by giving him land, the value of which he and the community would
“create” (*The Jeffersonian Dream* 41). Because the homesteaders were essentially doing the country a favor by settling the thousands of acres of public lands, the government was willing to give land to them, believing as Jefferson did, that the small land holders were “the most precious part of the state.” This is also an indisputable statement of how the government determined the value of land. The land on the “outer fringes of settlement” wasn’t looked at in terms of beauty, scenery, or tourism. Instead, it was what the ground could produce based on crops, grazing, and what could be sold (*The Jeffersonian Dream* 41).

However, the Homestead Act didn’t initially include any land in the Uinta Mountains. The land in that area was occupied by local ranchers who “used the ranges without restriction and took whatever timber they needed” (Swett Ranch Management Plan). It wasn’t until later, when the Forest Reserves were created, that the government made efforts to control the use of resources and land in that area. Among the first of these ranchers was a man named Cleophus Dowd. Little is known about him other than he moved into Sheep Creek Canyon, claiming the land through squatters rights, a policy that allowed citizens to gain control of land no one else was using after remaining there for a number of years. In 1884 Dowd sold his land to Lewis Allen for $2,000.00. Allen and his wife, Helena Parsons, the daughter of one of the first settlers of Brown’s Park, moved to what they named the “Lone Pine Ranch,” located on the same acreage where the Swett Ranch would eventually be built. However, as Allen’s children grew older and the isolation of the area was no longer desirable, he moved his family to Vernal so his children would be able to attend school. He worked in merchandising, later becoming a postmaster in Vernal.
Not allowing the land to stay empty for long, another family moved into the area. This time, however, they would stay longer and establish the small ranching community of Greendale. William Riley Green and his sons Sanford, John, and William heard rumors of the possibility of a railroad coming through the area. Deciding to capitalize on the possibility of tourism, they moved from Vernal to the mountains, endeavoring to build a resort. By diverting streams between two smaller lakes they created one large lake known as Greens Lake, still present today.

Although the railroad never materialized, their early recognition of the prospect of tourism and recreation on the mountain is an indication of what was to come. In fact, others had seen the possibilities of tourism and lamented the isolation of the area. In 1902, a promotional brochure from the Lucerne Land and Water Company stated that it “[w]ould be a famous summer resort if scenery galore, such as snow-clad summits, large forests, picturesque canyons, sylvan lakes, and grassy meadows, alone could make it so, for these things are all there in great abundance […]. But easy access, good accommodations and judicious advertising are only conspicuous by their absence” (Johnson 246). During this time, similar tracts of land such as Yellowstone were being turned into National Parks. However, access to Yellowstone was facilitated by the Northern Pacific Railroad, built in the 1880s and the Union Pacific Railroad built in 1908. The railroads, as well as large amounts of publicity, contributed to the use of Yellowstone for recreation much earlier than many other places, including the Uinta Mountains. Because the Green family realized tourism would be nearly impossible without railroads, they decided to try their hands at ranching. It was around this time that the Uinta Forest Reserves were created out of the land they hoped to own.
The Forest Reserve Act of 1891 was a crucial turning point in public land policy in the United States. Section 24 of the Act states “[t]hat the President of the United States may, from time to time, set apart and reserve, in any State or Territory having public land bearing forests […] whether of commercial value or not, as public reservations, and the President shall, by public proclamation declare the establishment of such reservations and the limits thereof” (Forest History Society). As a result of the creation of this act, ranchers, who had been able to use the land for whatever they needed, specifically cattle grazing and timber, were suddenly required to obtain permits, and the “unlimited grazing the ranchers had enjoyed was sharply curtailed as the forest was put to other uses” (Swett Ranch Management Plan). In 1905 Pinchot, the first chief of the U.S. Forest Service, wrote a manual called *The Use of the National Forests*, which included the instructions and regulations for the employees of the newly founded Forest Service. He summarized the reasons for requiring grazing permits, stating they were for “[t]he protection and conservative use of all forest reserve land adapted for grazing, the best permanent good of the live-stock industry through proper care and improvement of the grazing lands [and] the protection of the settler and home builder against unfair competition in the use of the range” (20). The grazing permits and restrictions were, from the beginning, meant to help and protect the individual rancher, as well as limit potential damage to public lands. Stockmen were expected to be informed of and cooperate with the new guidelines.

Pinchot also outlined the basis on which decisions would be made, in the present and future, stating: “In the management of each reserve, local questions will be decided upon local grounds; the dominant industry will be considered first, but with as little restriction to minor industries as may be possible; sudden changes in industrial conditions
will be avoided by gradual adjustment after due notice, and where conflicting interests must be reconciled the question will always be decided from the standpoint of the greatest good of the greatest number in the long run” (11). This policy would be critical in deciding how the best use of the land is determined. From its outset, the Forest Service encouraged ranching and lumbering, within limits, recognizing that they were the dominant industries. However, they recognized changes might occur, and other dominant industries might appear, but assured that individuals affected by these changes were to be given “due notice” to the “gradual adjustments.”

The effects of this act didn’t reach the Uinta Mountains until 1897 when President Grover Cleveland used his power as President to create the Uinta Forest Reserve, headquartered in Provo, Utah. The reserve was made up of 842,000 acres of public land, including what would become Greendale. The direct involvement of the government regarding the use of public lands was a consequence of the concerns of conservationists, citizens, and politicians, who were worried that if left without guidelines, ranchers and farmers would overgraze public lands. So, while the government was eager to provide citizens with the opportunity to own land, they simultaneously recognized that, as Runte writes, “the result of privatization was not always what the nation had expected or wanted.” He goes on to explain that, “especially during the last third of the nineteenth century, speculators swarmed over the public domain in what has come to be known as ‘the Great Barbecue’ of natural resources. The abuses both real and alleged, of this land rush finally convinced thinking Americans of the need for significant land-use reform” (2). Efforts were made to control this “Great Barbecue,” with support from the government as well as the citizens.
In *Carving Up the Commons: Congress and Our Public Lands*, Jane Blaeloch highlights the emerging conflict between the government and its citizens, stating: “From the beginning, land in America […] has been an issue of contention and the subject of deeply divided ideologies. On one end of the spectrum are those who believe there is intrinsic, ecological, spiritual, cultural, and aesthetic value in retaining public land, a *commons*; on the other are those who see the public domain as a “government land grab” that prevents these areas from being developed or exploited for direct economic benefit” (vii). A balance needed to be found and citizens allowed to live on what they felt was their rightful property.

As Congress tried to grant more citizens possession of public lands, appeasing people on both ends of the spectrum, the National Forest Homestead Act was signed into law in 1906, nine years after the Uinta Forest Reserve was created. This act opened for settlement lands in the National Forests which were found by the Secretary of Agriculture to be “chiefly valuable for the agriculture and not needed for public purposes” (Swedinn ii). At that time the land was not particularly desirable because of the isolation of the location, as well as the difficulty of farming the soil. In 1861, an exploring party sent to the Uintah Basin by Brigham Young declared the region to be “fit only for grazing” (Loosle 7). Though scenic, the land was looked at solely in terms of agriculture, ranching, and timber. Because the government didn’t need it, they were willing to let others take ownership of it and see whether or not they could be successful.

The Green family, already living in that area, was the first to file for a homestead. On July 4, 1907, Sanford Green’s petition was the first to be approved. One of the next to file for a homestead was James Swett. He was married to Sanford’s sister, Roseltha, and
had three young children. After receiving a claim, he moved his young family to the mountain in 1909. However, Jim didn’t go alone. Instead, he opened the door for many of his family members to come with him, follow his trail up the mountain, seeing for themselves the possibilities he did. Among those hoping to have his own piece of the verdant Greendale was one who would love the land and stay until the day he died, my great-grandfather, Oscar Swett.

Oscar Swett was born August 11, 1890 in Payson, Utah to Elizabeth Ellen Langston Swett (who went by Ellen) and Lyman Johnson Swett. Both of his parents came to Utah as part of the Mormon migrations, beginning in 1847. On July 24, 1877, Lyman married Ellen Langston when he was forty-three and she was only nineteen. The couple lived in Payson on a farm where thirteen children were born, but only six lived to adulthood. In 1902, when Oscar was twelve years old, the family moved to Vernal, where Lyman began building a two-story home for his family. However, he died in the summer of 1907 at the age of seventy-three before the home was completed. Lyman’s sons finished the house for their mother. Although he passed away when his children were still young, Lyman was able to pass on valuable skills to his children. He was proficient at farming, carpentry, and blacksmithing, trades he taught his sons. Oscar would use what he learned from his father for the rest of his life.

From the time he was young, Oscar knew he wanted to be a rancher. Realizing her son’s aspirations, his mother provided him the means to make it possible. Oscar’s son Louis stated, “After Grandad [Lyman] died, his mother gave him $100.00 to buy stock with and he started buying calves and built him up a herd. That’s how he started” (Swett 1990). Oscar went to the mountain frequently to see his brother Jim and to graze his
cattle. Oscar’s daughter Irma wrote, “The ranchers in the Vernal area trailed their cattle up the mountain and over to Rock Springs. Dad trailed their cattle along with the other ranchers to Rock Springs through Greendale. It was so beautiful and he loved that country up in the high mountains. He could see the possibilities of ranching and raising a family on the mountain” (Irma Toone 2007). While the Homestead Act provided him with the opportunity to own land, Oscar probably would have found a way to live and work outside either way. Though he was eager to establish a permanent home, he wanted to do it on his own terms, being free to make his own decisions. Stegner wrote of the force that propelled many people like Oscar to seek independence through living on his own land: "It should not be denied […] that being footloose has always exhilarated us. It is associated in our minds with escape from history and oppression and law and irksome obligations, with absolute freedom, and the road has always led West" (Introduction, The American West As Living Space 2). Though Oscar was not necessarily “footloose,” he was anxious and eager to go out on his own, to be his own boss, and to decide for himself what his life would be like.

Although the National Forest Homestead Act opened up the area for settling, Oscar was too young at the time to file for a claim. The law stated that a person needed to be at least twenty-one years old, and Oscar was only nineteen. To solve this problem his mother agreed to make the claim for him. Oscar’s daughter Mary said, “When people began to homestead around his chosen spot, [Oscar] began to worry that his land would be taken before he got old enough to homestead it. So his mother filed for some land up there, and he and his brother worked the land for her and built a cabin so she could prove up on it” (Arrowsmith 1976). The first few years she lived on the Greendale ranch in the
summer while Oscar took care of her ranch in Vernal. When the claim for 151 ½ acres was approved, on July 9, 1909, Ellen began “grubbing” the land, or clearing it of sagebrush. This she did herself, pulling the sagebrush out with a “grubbing hoe” and stacking it into piles to be burned. On November 3, 1915, she filed for eight and a half more acres, bringing the total acreage to 160.

During this time Oscar worked odd jobs, trailing cattle through the area. It was on one of these jobs, near Heber City, Utah, that he met Emma Osiek. From Baltimore, Maryland, her father, Louis August Osiek, joined the Army and was stationed at Fort Douglas in Salt Lake City. After being discharged, he moved to Park City where he became a baker and met Eliza Jane Bethers, who was working as a confectionary at the same bakery. She had a daughter from a previous marriage named Lydia. After they married, Eliza and Louis Osiek had six more children, Emma the third oldest.

Emma’s family moved frequently, something she didn’t enjoy. She said she never stayed in one place long enough to really feel at home. Her family eventually ended up close to Heber City, where she and Oscar met. According to their daughter Mary, Oscar saw Emma and her friend walking through the fields. Perhaps asking if she needed help, Oscar initiated a conversation. Emma must not have minded his offer, because he soon began joining her family for dinner when he was in the area. While he was away they kept in touch mostly through postcards. She became his motivation to quickly make improvements to the land and build a cabin they could live in. She probably read his updates of the ranch with anticipation, waiting for the time when they could work on it together. They were married on November 12, 1912.
During the first few years after their marriage, Oscar and Emma lived in Vernal during the winter and stayed on the ranch during the summer, clearing the land of sagebrush and constructing barns and fences, preparing the land for the time they would live on it permanently. No longer empty, the land was home to a family that would stay for close to sixty years, longer if they could have, but who would never really leave.

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Later that night, after washing the Greendale dirt from our faces, hands, and feet, my parents got us ready for bed. They marveled at how much dirt we could bring home in a single trip. Jon and Jeff were still talking about the deer, and I had carefully placed my flowers on my night stand. As I lay in bed watching my parents turn out the lights, I quietly asked, “Mom, Dad? Can we go back tomorrow?”

“No, not tomorrow,” my mom said, smiling in the dark. “We have too many things to do here. But we’ll go back soon, I promise.”

And we did.
I was sixteen and tired of camping. Lying on the rocky ground at the end of a row comprised of my father and two brothers, I shifted again, unable to find a smooth place for my back. Annoyed, I listened to the soft snores of my father and brothers, wondering how they were able to sleep with the plummeting temperatures, the rushing water of the creek just outside our tent door, and the wild howls of coyotes in the distance. I almost wished I had stayed in Vernal with my mother, who made no secret of hating to camp. However, not wanting to appear a sissy in front of the boys of my family, I insisted on camping. Now I let out a deep breath and rolled over again. Finally, knowing it was pointless to stay where I was, I found a flashlight. Holding it in one hand and using my other to open my duffel bag, I pulled out a sweatshirt. Shivering, I found another blanket to wrap around me and, as quietly as I could, unzipped the door to the tent, and climbed out. I didn’t plan on going far; I just wanted to take a quick walk to get the anxiety of not being able to sleep out of my system. As I walked toward the white house, I could hear the hum of generators in the camping trailers and see a few flashlights and lanterns in some of the tents. I was glad to know I wasn’t the only one awake.

It was the third night I had spent up on the ranch and, despite the less-than-adequate sleeping conditions, I had to admit, I was having fun. The family reunion this year consisted mostly of my grandmother’s children and grandchildren, which meant I saw many of my cousins I hadn’t seen since we were little. After the awkwardness wore
off, we talked like we used to, except this time it was about boys and getting our drivers’ licenses.

The almost full moon made it bright enough for me to find the fence. I touched the rough logs and looked at the notches in the fence that we had built earlier that day. When my family contacted the Forest Service about staying on the ranch, they agreed and asked if we would be willing to help with some projects they had. The project my family and the Forest Service decided upon was rebuilding a portion of the fence that ran to the side of the three homes, root cellar, and spring house. The wire and post fence that had been there was in desperate need of attention. When my father came up to the ranch in the summers, he often helped Oscar build other fences like this, called worm fences, which went in a zig-zag pattern instead of going straight. Because one of the distinguishing features of the ranch was the fences, the Forest Service felt it was important to have historically accurate fences in their representation of the ranch. Using logs cut down and brought in by the Forest Service, we spent most of the day pulling out the old posts and fitting the new poles into the notches, replacing almost one hundred yards.

In the afternoon we gathered in front of the newly constructed fence for pictures. I’m sure we were quite a sight. Tired and sweaty, faces smudged with dirt, we smiled for the camera, all wearing dark green t-shirts with the ox yoke, the Swett Ranch logo, on the front. I had screen printed the shirts at my work earlier that summer, and it felt good to see everyone wearing something I had made in front of something we had made together (figure 1).
However, what stuck out to me most that day was my grandmother. Usually quiet and somewhat reserved, she seemed to be in her element again. She had been talkative the entire day, wanting to share her memories of what the ranch was like when she was little, explaining how different things were then. When we met to take the picture, she surprised us all by climbing on top of the fence, straddling the logs. I couldn’t believe my eighty-two-year-old grandmother was sitting on top of the fence along with her much younger grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Of course I knew she hadn’t always been old, but I had never considered that she had been young. That night as I looked around at the cabins and white home, I realized that this is where she grew up, where she was living when she was my age. This is where she played with her brothers and sisters, where she learned to cook like her mother and where she stacked hay with her father. I wondered what it would be like to have a place where all of your memories are contained, a place where your childhood is preserved. Though I was only sixteen, my family had moved five times. I thought of my great-grandmother, who never liked moving, the packing up, putting away, starting over.
Maybe that’s why she loved the mountain and cried the day she left, almost sixty years after she arrived.

My grandmother was, however, almost opposite of her mother. She stayed on the mountain until she was grown, only leaving to go to school in the fall. There was no way I could go back to the home where I took my first steps or began eating solid foods. Here, my grandmother could. She had spent her entire married life moving from place to place, as my grandfather looked for teaching jobs. But, the one place she could always come back to, and bring her children, was the ranch. I thought of my grandmother and her siblings growing up here. I wondered if they talked about what life would be like when they got older, or were they like me and unable to fathom life past the age of thirty? Did they imagine their children and grandchildren coming back to the place where they were young? Though I didn’t know much about the ranch or my great-grandparents, I knew they were important to my grandmother and especially to my father. I marveled at the pull of the land, continuing to bring the family together, even generations after Oscar and Emma arrived.

I wondered what it was that kept us coming back.

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My grandmother was born during a snowy May in 1917. Though the third child of Oscar and Emma, she was the first to be born on the ranch. There was no doctor in Manila and only two in Vernal. Knowing the baby was due anytime, Oscar rode the forty miles into Vernal, squinting in the blowing snow and guiding his horse through the deep snow drifts, in order to bring a doctor up to the mountain. However, the only doctor he found refused to go up on the mountain during the storm. Willing to compromise, Oscar
arranged to meet him at the edge of the snow with his pregnant wife. He hurried back to bring Emma down off the mountain, but soon found it was unnecessary. Irma Eliza, my grandmother, had been born while he was away. Elvira Green and Zell Swett, neighbors and relatives, had come to help Emma deliver her baby (Irma Toone 2007). The attendance of other women at the birth of my grandmother demonstrates the crucial social and familial connections that came with living away from the city. Mary Neth, a professor of women’s history, writes of these “networks,” in rural communities: “Childbirth […] principally involved women’s networks. But these female networks integrated kin and neighbors and crossed generational lines” (64). My grandmother was welcomed into the world by that network, there when her father and the doctor couldn’t be.

The cabin my grandmother was born in had been abandoned, left in McKee Draw, close to Oscar’s homestead. Nobody knew when it was built, or who built it, but to Oscar, the cabin was something he could find use for if nobody else did. After numbering the logs and dismantling the cabin, he hauled it to its present site. His oldest daughter, Mary, later explained what their early conditions were like: “When they moved up to the land, I was just a babe. At first people just built tiny, one-room cabins. With all the clearing and work to be done, there wasn’t time to build anything fancy. They just kind of built a shelter to last the winter in” (qtd. in Swett Ranch Management Plan). Though the cabin was only meant to be temporary, it was cramped with three young children. Oscar and Emma’s oldest child, Mary, born in 1913, was four-years-old, and their first son, Tom, born in 1915, was only two when my grandmother was born.
That summer they continued clearing sagebrush and building up their cattle herd. Emma did much of the work, leaving early in the morning, taking her small children with her, and “grubbing” the sagebrush. She would pull it out of the ground and have her children place it in piles. As a reward for their help, she allowed whoever had stacked the biggest pile to light it on fire. Emma often had to take breaks throughout the day to nurse Irma or feed Mary and Tom. They would return to their small cabin at night, exhausted from the long day in the sun, piling into the one bed the family owned, only to repeat the process the next day. Mary said of her mother, “Women don’t get the credit they deserve for the work they did as homestead wives. Dad worked another field in Vernal, and sometimes he’d be gone for three weeks at a time. Mom had to take care of us, the little ones, the field, the stock and the house. Why, she even stacked hay” (qtd. in Swett Ranch Management Plan). Though Emma probably didn’t receive the credit she deserved, her contributions to the success of the ranch cannot be overlooked.

Emma’s work represents the efforts of most women and children working alongside their husbands and fathers. While some situations were mostly male dominated, with the division between men’s work and women’s work clearly defined, the more successful farms and ranches blurred those distinctions. Neth writes, “Outside the most authoritarian family relations, women and children could use the need for their labor and the ties of marriage and kinship to gain greater control of their lives and decisions of the farm” (39). Because Oscar was not concerned with social conventions that looked down on women doing men’s work, Emma enjoyed greater freedom in determining her contribution to the ranch, as well as how her children would be taught to work. Neth goes on to say, “Flexibility of task assignments, commitments to home production and making
do, the willingness to sacrifice for the good of the farm and the family were all economic survival strategies that were most successful in an enterprise of shared interests rather than one of hierarchal dominance” (39). Emma’s ability to make decisions on her own and take charge when needed are qualities I admire in her. Her assertiveness made her marriage to Oscar more of a partnership, without one spouse dominating the other.

Oscar and Emma’s early recognition that stringent gender roles would only hinder the success of the ranch allowed them to work together and learn the different aspects of working in the fields versus working in the kitchen. Also, just as the Swetts designed their homes and ranch in a way to be successful, they also inserted themselves into a community that depended on each other for support, as well as survival. Writer and historian Teresa Jordan describes the connection between survival and community: “The design of each building, each corral, each ditch, was tied directly to the creative act of staying alive. So was the interdependence of the people who lived there, the design of the community itself” (16). Emma’s ability to do her husband’s work, as well as willingness to accept help from others, proved to be a vital benefit when Oscar was unable to do the work himself.

Around Thanksgiving the winter after my grandmother was born, Oscar and Sanford Green went deer hunting. When they returned, Oscar was in visible pain. Mary remembered hearing her father call for her mother.

“Emma!” he yelled, “come here, I need your help getting off the horse.”

Emma hurried out of the home with Mary and Tom close behind, whispering to each other that something was wrong with their father, wondering if he had been shot.

“What’s wrong?” she asked, the concern rising in her voice.
“It’s my leg, I can’t move it,” he answered, wincing with pain. He rode his horse to the chicken coop where he was able to lean against it and get one leg off. Emma helped get his other leg off and led him to the cabin, followed by the children (Arrowsmith 1989).

Nobody knew what was wrong with Oscar for over a month. He couldn’t move without excruciating pain and spent most of his days in bed. Being unable to work was probably more difficult for him to handle than the actual pain of his ailment. His close friend and neighbor, Orson Burton, came over frequently, helping Emma with the cattle and chores. During the long nights when Oscar couldn’t sleep and needed help from his chair to his bed, Orson sat up with him, speaking reassuring words, allowing Emma a few moments of rest.

Because they were so far away from Vernal or Manila, the Swetts depended on their neighbors and family members who were on the mountain with them. This was a common occurrence in most homesteading communities. While some ranching or homesteading men are looked upon as stubborn and individualistic, the converse is actually more accurate. To be successful, they couldn’t survive on their own. Neth writes of the expectations neighbors in rural communities had for each other: “Neighbors did not tally exchanges, more viewed them as taking turns. If you had something nice, you should simply send it to a neighbor. If you needed something, you should ask for favors, too. It was important that a good neighbor request assistance as well as provide it” (40). Oscar’s recognition of the connection between survival and the willingness to accept and give help when it was needed was what permitted his brother Jim and Orson Burton to offer their assistance when they saw Oscar needed it. At other times, the Swetts
themselves provided support and help to their neighbors and community. When the county approved funds for a school to be built, Oscar was one of the first to volunteer his help to build it.

Close to Christmas, Jim went to Vernal to ask a doctor about Oscar’s condition. The doctor followed Jim up to see Oscar for himself. Entering the cabin, he found Oscar lying in bed, surrounded by quilts Emma had made, looking pale and thin from weeks of staying inside. After examining Oscar, he pronounced, “All that’s the matter with you is that you aren’t eating enough fruit, you get a bunch of fruit here and you eat fruit, raw fruit, lots of fruit, especially oranges and lemons” (Arrowsmith 1989).

After Oscar recovered, having just about bought the general store out of fruit, the family moved into a two-room cabin he built. Soon after settling into their new cabin, their fourth child, Myrle, was born in May of 1919. Through their long, work-filled days, Oscar and Emma were establishing themselves on the mountain. Their cattle herd was growing, and they were becoming proficient at growing the oats and grain needed to feed the cows. Emma grew a garden, which Oscar helped plow, providing them with much of the vegetables they ate. Emma was a good seamstress, making most of the clothing for the family, even if the dresses for the girls were made out of flour sacks. The family began to keep more and more animals, such as chickens and pigs, to provide them with eggs and meat. They rarely ate beef, as that is where the little money they made came from. The entire family made at least two trips to Vernal, forty miles away, each year, once during the fall just before the winter storms, and once in the spring, after the snow had melted. Their shopping list normally included one to two hundred pounds of sugar, five gallons of honey, forty bushels of apples, along with various other fruits and berries.
Emma would use to preserve and make jams and jellies. Oscar would make a separate trip to buy the flour, since they bought it by the ton (Swedin 84).

Their youngest daughter, Wilda, remembered that her parents were always generous. She said that the first thing her mother always asked visitors was, “Have you eaten?” No matter the reply, Emma would say, “We’ll fix up a little bite” (Irish 1989). This exchange happened quite often, especially in the later years of the ranch. Wilda recalled feeding around thirty people, most of them extended family members or hired help, many days during the summer. Their son Louis said that he thought his dad spent more money feeding passers-by than he spent on his family. Visiting was an essential characteristic of rural communities, and the visits usually involved food. Neth writes, “These visits were rarely pre-arranged; neighbors simply arrived, ‘visiting’ and ‘staying for dinner.’ Because these visits were so regular, they were clearly expected even if unplanned” (54). Visiting provided the basis for friendships and connections between neighbors, allowing them to cling to each other during the uncertainties of homesteading and to celebrate their successes.

Emma, like other women, was responsible for much of the success of her ranch. Mary Clearman Blew writes of her grandmother, “It was Mary, […] who best withstood the rigors of homesteading. […] She taught Sylva [her daughter] how to walk the quarter of a mile to the nearest of the new neighbors in case of trouble. She broke sod for a garden and kept her cow fresh. […] No one in her care was ever hungry, or unclothed. […] Her shack was clean and warm, if unlovely. What she could do, she did” (All But the Waltz 188). Emma too did what she could with what she had. She learned the best ways to can produce, store food, quilt, and make clothes. She did much of this on her own,
figuring it out as she went along. Together, she and Oscar learned by experience, sometimes through trial and error, the best way to live their day-to-day lives on the mountain.

Oscar’s cattle herd grew steadily. At the peak of his cattle business, he owned approximately 200 cattle and 150 sheep. He used the surrounding Forest Service land to graze his animals, something that was allowed from before the time he arrived on the mountain. In order to do this, he needed permits. The Forest Service began issuing grazing permits in 1906 “for the consumption of public forage in the forests” (Rowley 108).

Phil Johnson, a Forest Service employee, details the process: “He would have gone to the district ranger and filled out what little paper work there was and would have paid a fee for grazing on the basis of an animal unit month. That’s one cow and calf for one month. The grazing season shortened with time because over time the livestock was going on too early and destroying the type of vegetation you wanted” (Johnson 2010). William Rowley, a professor of history, explains another reason for the permit system, besides preventing the destruction of vegetation: “The permit conferred power to the agency, and the threat of its denial, restriction, or reduction of numbers grazed under it could be used to coerce desired grazing practices from permit holders. But within this use privilege, permit, or allotment were the seeds for private claims to forage use on the public lands, that is, grazing rights” (108). This system seemed to strike a balance between private citizens and the managers of public land, satisfying, for the time being, both parties.
For the majority of his duration on the mountain, Oscar was able to obtain these permits without difficulty. He worked closely with the district ranger, willing to abide by the system that had been outlined. However, it was the design of the system, with the ultimate power lying with the Forest Service, which would eventually be the cause of Oscar’s conflict with the Forest Service. He was not the only one placed in a precarious position by these permits. They were also known as “preferences,” indicating “some stockholders could have the permits and others could not” (Rowley 108). It is obvious from the beginning that the Forest Service deemed it necessary to keep a close hold on its open range ranchers, and they felt this was best accomplished through the permit system.

In the early years, when the permit system was not an issue for Oscar, he turned some of his attention to lumber, a benefit that came from being surrounded by the forest. Harold Steen, a Forest Service historian, explains that “timber policy emphasized that the “prime object of the forest reserves is use.” As long as safeguards for streams, soil and the remaining forest were followed, timber could be sold and cut to meet “actual need.” No upper limit was placed on timber sale size, other than the principle that monopoly would not be tolerated” (79). Because, according to the Forest Service, the first object of the forest was to be “used,” they were willing to let the community members use the timber. Thus, Oscar was able to expand his livelihood and improve his family’s living conditions.

In order to cut and process his timber, Oscar obtained a $1500.00 mortgage on his property on January 17, 1921. He used this money to purchase a steam-powered saw mill. However, after an accident resulted in the death of one of the hired men, Oscar decided to use a water-powered mill instead. The trees Oscar cut were from the surrounding Forest
Service land. The *Use Book* stated, “All timber on forest reserves which can be cut safely and for which there is actual need is for sale,” and “[t]here is no limit, except the capacity of the forest, to the quantity which may be sold to one purchaser” (Pinchot 32). These guidelines were clearly to Oscar’s advantage, allowing him to use the surrounding forest as a way to increase his income. He was willing to abide by policies stating that “[t]imber may be cut only on the area designated by the forest officer [and] [n]o unmarked living trees may be cut, if marking is required by the officer in charge or by the terms of the sale” (Pinchot 39). After cutting down the timber authorized by the local ranger, Oscar loaded it on a sleigh, and hauled them to his lumber mill. He cut down most of the logs during the winter because it was easier for him to move them across the snow.

Oscar’s use of timber from the surrounding area highlights what would become a contention between the rights of the common good versus the private citizen. In an 1883 report, Charles Sprague Sargent, an American botanist, states, “The forest wealth of this country is undoubtedly enormous. Great as it is, however, it is not inexhaustible, and the forests of the United States, in spite of their extent, variety, and richness […] cannot always continue productive if the simplest laws of nature governing their growth are disregarded” (490). To appease the loggers as well as the public, a policy was put in place that only allowed use of timber on public lands when the timber on private lands was gone. As William Robbins, a Western historian, explains, “One must remember that property rights restrictions and market regulations are not recent, secretly hatched government conspiracies, rather they were developed over time as fairly popular actions in the public’s interest” (16). Oscar abided by these restrictions, taking only what the
Forest Service permitted. He recognized the need to leave as little mark as possible on the land, while still using what he needed to survive.

The lumber Oscar cut from the mountain helped him provide for his family in many ways. He used the logs to build several of the buildings on the ranch, such as the spring house, root cellar, chicken coop and pig pen, and blacksmith shops. Oscar also hauled the lumber to Vernal, where he would sell it for about $35.00 for 2,000 feet. The high school shop teacher was always willing to pay him $40.00 for his choice lumber—it couldn’t have any knots in it—for use in his classes (Swedin 103-104). In 1918 Oscar built the two-room cabin, complete with both a kitchen and bedroom. Though the cabin was much larger than their first one, it was still cramped for the growing family. Oscar, Emma, and their four young children continued to sleep in the same bed, huddling together to keep warm during the winter nights.

During the winter of 1916-1917, Oscar’s mother, Ellen Swett, began running a small school for all the children in the area, most of whom were her grandchildren. Oscar and Emma, along with Ellen, recognized the need for their children to gain an education. Ellen herself, according to Mary, “had a good education, and was very interesting to listen to about her way of living.” (Arrowsmith 1989). As more families came to the area and the children grew, it became apparent that a permanent school needed to be established. In 1926, the county provided $300.00 for a school house to be built. Most of the men in the community helped finish the school, building the desks and other furnishings. As with most rural schools, the teachers came from across the country, usually only staying for a year. Salary ranged from $60.00-80.00 during the twenty years it was open (Swedin 111). Teachers were typically single women, who were passing
through the area and agreed to stay simply to have a place to live. Blew explains why many women accepted teaching as a profession: “Teaching in the far-flung was the one certain road to marginal independence for young women” (112). Because rural schools always needed teachers, and the Greendale community saw the need for education, teachers could depend on a steady job even during uncertain economic times. In this way, women could earn their own living, independent of men or family members.

Grades one through eight were taught at the school, and all the Swett children attended at least one year. When the children reached high school age they were sent to either Vernal or Manila to live with family members and friends to finish school. In 1942, because it became easier to travel to Vernal or Manila for school, the Greendale School was closed. The Forest Service viewed it as a fire hazard and offered it to Oscar. He hooked it up to his team of horses and hauled it to his property, where he used it to expand his tool shop.

Before the 1920s few rural children attended school beyond the eighth grade, including Oscar and Emma. However, by the time they had their own children, society was changing and a high school diploma went from being a luxury to a necessity for those in rural communities. Recalling her parent’s commitment to their education, Irma writes: “I think I had the best help with homework. Mother and Dad would sit at the table with us until we were finished with our lessons. They would explain everything to us all, so we all got to hear each other’s lessons. Mother and Dad didn’t have anything more important to do than to be with us” (Irma Toone 2007). Oscar served on the Daggett County School Board for five years, from 1926-1931 and travelled monthly to Manila for
meetings. Travel during the winter months meant crossing the Green River when it was frozen over and risking snow storms and blizzards.

This determination to be a part of the community and be involved in his children’s education characterized Oscar’s forward attitude and belief that education was essential for success in his children’s lives. This counters previous ideas that children who grew up in rural communities were ignorant and that education was viewed as unnecessary. Neth writes that in the 1920’s other Progressive Era reformers “[c]laimed that a modern education was crucial to middle-class status. […] Reformers believed that the high schools would broaden farm people’s horizons, encourage their cooperation with towns, and enlarge their concept of community” (125). As the country became more technologically advanced and education began playing a larger role in peoples’ lives the Swetts too recognized the need to fit in and function in society.

In addition to giving their children advantages as they got older, the Swetts believed that educating their children would benefit the home they had to leave behind. Teresa Jordan explains, “Thomas Jefferson thought of education as a gift. The new knowledge would benefit the community and the student would continue to receive from that community the deeper, older education of place” (80). The Swett children had a well-rounded education according to that definition. They were taught how to live on the land and what physical labor was like, things that could not be taught in the classroom. At the same time, their academic learning was not slighted in the process, serving to reinforce the practical lessons they learned on the ranch.

Though sending their children to school in the fall was a financial, as well as a familial burden, it was a something Oscar and Emma never questioned. Neth goes on to
write of the sacrifices rural families experienced when it came to education: “Sending a child to high school required significant sacrifices […]. Farm people often had to pay for tuition, transportation, or board, books, and supplies, and they also lost the significant labor of older youths” (125). Because education was important to the Swetts, they continued sending their children to school each fall, regardless of the cost. All of their children, except Louis who became ill and was unable to finish, graduated from high school, and two daughters even attended college. Their early exposure to school and the outside world proved to be beneficial to all the children. They were able to obtain good jobs and had the same expectations for their children that their parents had for them.

Oscar and Emma’s family continued to grow, with two more daughters born while they were still living in the two-room cabin, Verla in 1921 and Idabell in 1926. This brought the total number of people who were living there to eight, not including the visitors and hired help the Swetts often had. In answer to the need for his children to have room to spread out in as they got older, Oscar built a five-room home in 1929. He said he wanted a build a nice, big kitchen for Emma so “she wouldn’t kick him out” (Irma Toone 2007). Most of the materials came from the mountain, such as logs for the walls and rocks for the foundation. Oscar, with the help of his family, built the entire home, only hiring help for the ceiling. Their last son, Louis, was born in 1929, just after they moved into their new home.

Figure 2 shows the ranch after the buildings were completed, all within a relatively short period of time, reflecting the focus and determination of the family.
That November, the Swetts invited the entire neighborhood to their home for Thanksgiving. Running through the bedrooms that were almost as large as the first cabin they lived in, Irma, Myrle and Verla declared to their friends that their new home was a "mansion." In the kitchen that Oscar made sure was big enough, Emma cooked a Thanksgiving dinner for all eight families living in Greendale. Though young, Mary, Irma, Myrle, and Verla, probably helped make the food, mashing the potatoes and steaming the beans that came from their garden. The Greens, Burtons, Arrowsmiths, among others, piled into the home, sitting wherever they could find a seat. The voices that filled the home were happy ones, their owners glad to have a day off and a place where they could spend it. That evening, Oscar and Emma looked at each other, their children, their new home on the mountain, and marveled at how much they had accomplished in ten years. This would be one of the most memorable Thanksgivings for the family.
In addition to the buildings that dotted the land, Oscar also expanded his acreage. He and his friend, Orson Burton, paid $2,000.00 for Sanford Green’s homestead when he left around 1928. Orson and Oscar shared the land, grazing their cattle together. Oscar and Emma’s family continued to expand as well. They had two more daughters before their family was complete, Merne born in 1932 and Wilda in 1936. Emma was forty-four years old when her last child was born and had no major problems with any of her pregnancies. Although seven girls and two boys might not seem like very good odds for a ranching family, the Swetts never viewed having so many daughters as a disadvantage. Oscar and Emma taught the girls to take care of the animals, irrigate the fields, and stack hay in the summer.

All of the children worked alongside both parents, sometimes helping Emma in the house with the large amounts of cooking and cleaning that needed to be done, as well as helping Oscar in the fields and with the cattle. Neth says that this type of chore sharing was common; children especially, “performed a variety of tasks that crossed gender lines.” Also, though chores became more gender defined as children grew older, they also, “learned an obligation to the farm and family that superseded such definitions” (19). Oscar and Emma treated their daughters like sons in many respects. Myrle remembered constantly following her father around, learning how to drive the teams and stack hay. She said when she was young her father would take her with the teams out to build the fires to get rid of the debris. On the way home he would put her hands in his gloves and say, “Look at that! You’re driving the team” (Myrle Moore 2010). This small statement from Oscar bolstered Myrle’s confidence, making her believe that she was capable of doing anything, on the ranch and off.
Though not overly emotional, Oscar and Emma were caring, constantly showing their children they loved them. When Mary was about four, she was given a kitten from one of their relatives, probably in Vernal. On the trip back to the ranch, she put the box that the kitten was in underneath the canvas cover of the wagon because it was raining. Part way up the mountain, she remembered the kitten and looked under the canvas for it, but it was gone and so was the box. She began crying, wanting her kitten back. Without saying anything, Oscar stopped the team and got out of the wagon. He was gone for about forty five minutes, but when he came back, he was carrying the kitten. Mary summed it up simply, saying, “That’s the kind of person he was” (Arrowsmith 1989).

Wilda remembered that every year she looked forward to going home to the ranch when school was let out for the summer. She would come out of the school, waiting to see Oscar standing beside his 1942 pick-up truck. One year on his way down, he had come to a big bog hole. Knowing he couldn’t leave Wilda waiting in Vernal, he returned home and got Louis and a team of horses. They went back to the bog hole and pulled the pick-up across to the other side, leaving Louis there waiting all day for them to return. When Oscar and Wilda got to the bog hole, she realized what had happened. She tried to thank him, but remembers, “You can't thank my dad for things, he just wouldn't let you. He would manage to walk away from you or turn his back or do something so he didn't have to accept thanks for it. Probably never told that man that I loved him, because he wouldn't have accepted it. But he was always there, I could guarantee it. The last day of school, he would be in town” (Irish 1989).
Because Oscar was patient and understanding with his children, they grew up loving to be around him. Though Tom was eager to leave the ranch and do something besides farming, he returned often, bringing his children to visit. Louis and his father were particularly close. He later said that “I picked up with dad, and I was in his hind pocket about all the time. We rode a lot, and there was hardly a day that went by that I wasn’t with him someplace or another” (Swett 1990). Louis’ speech and word choice echo his father, even years after Oscar passed away. Phrases like “picked up with” and “hind pocket,” reflect the way everyone spoke on the ranch. My own father continues to use phrases and words he heard through listening to Oscar and Louis speak.

Oscar taught Louis what he had learned from his father, and Louis became proficient at blacksmithing, shoeing, haying and everything else Oscar could do. The time it took Oscar to teach his children, Louis in particular, paid off, because in later years it was Louis who took upon himself much of the burden of running the ranch. Jordan states that, “A good cowboy needs to be a horseman, a vet, a midwife, a mechanic, a carpenter, a plumber, a surveyor, and an electrician” (174). According to this definition, Oscar and Louis were among the best cowboys. They could generally do whatever needed to be done on the ranch, without paying for professionals to help. For his entire life, Louis used what he learned from his father.

Life on the ranch for the children of Oscar and Emma was idyllic. Each child was taught to work hard, and they were all needed in helping the ranch run smoothly. They learned from an early age that all of their efforts were necessary, no job or responsibility more important than the other. Irma said of growing up, “Our life was pretty structured and we knew what to expect from Mother and Dad. We also knew what they expected
from us. But mostly, there was something fun, funny or interesting going on all the time. I can’t say I was ever bored, lonely, or had nothing to do. I could play anywhere and have a good time” (Irma Toone 2007).

Irma’s statement reflects the general attitude of the children; each one has happy memories of growing up on the ranch. They remembered Christmas parties where there wouldn’t be a lot of gifts, but the excitement came from being with their family members and neighbors. The children often played games at night in the summer, though they would still have to rise early to do their chores. They also recalled Emma reading novels to them at night and their father rough housing with them. Their parents taught them about ranching and cattle, as well as life, hard work, love and cooperation, through what they said, but especially what they did. Because their life on the mountain was relatively secluded, most of their time spent was with each other and on the ranch, two crucial elements that became the bedrock of their identities, their family and the mountain.

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The night breeze stiffened, seeping through the blanket I have pulled around me. I didn’t know what time it was, but I knew it was late. The howling coyotes in the distance reminded me how alone I was, standing in the field away from the other campers. However, before beginning my trek back, I paused and looked up at the sparkling night sky, the same one that blanketed the Swetts for so many years. I remembered what Wilda said about the stars, that each evening after dinner, “We would go out on the big porch and just rest, talk a little. Over the years my Dad taught us about the stars, and the milky-way, and I learned a lot about the weather from him, he would tell us when a rain storm was coming. Then, pretty soon Dad would get up and pull his pocket watch out and he’d
say ‘Well, the old Waterbury says it’s time for everybody to go to bed.’ Then he’d wind it and everyone would go to bed” (Irish 1989). Sure that the old Waterbury would tell me it was time for bed, I moved towards the tent, thinking of my grandmother and her siblings, walking these same, worn out paths when they were my age. I can’t help but hope that one day the ranch will mean as much to me as it did and does to them.
CHAPTER IV
TIMES, THEY ARE A-CHANGING

_The waters around you have grown; accept it that soon you’ll be drenched to the bone._

_-Bob Dylan_

July, 2003

The dry grass cracked under my feet. I looked at my dad, twenty feet in front of me, and quickened my pace to catch up. “How much further do we have?” I asked breathlessly as I reached him. “Oh, just another mile or so. You can almost see the ranch from here.” I sighed and decided not to point out that there were a great many things we could see from here, including Wyoming. I took a drink out of my water bottle and resumed the hike, as the sweat descended from my neck to my back.

We were back on the mountain for another family reunion, but this time we were staying in a campground close to twenty miles away from the ranch. Once again, I didn’t want to spend the night in Vernal with my mom and her mother. However, the tent was full so I ended up sleeping in my brother’s Toyota, feeling the gear shift press into my back every time I moved. I was tired, and just a bit cranky, the next morning when my dad talked me into going on a hike with him. Not one to sit around long, he had finished breakfast and was making the rounds, looking for volunteers. He had already recruited my brother, two of my cousins, and various other relatives, some more willing than others.

Finally, we came to a vista just above the ranch. It was just my dad and me at this point; the others had fallen well behind us. As I struggled to catch my breath, I realized just how large the ranch was. I saw the three homes in the center, with the spring house and rootcellar to the north. While we waited for the others to catch up, I pointed out
various buildings and asked what they were. Though I, like Teresa Jordan, “could not articulate such a thought at that time,” I was looking at the “history of my family, at the mark we had made on the land” (11).

As I stood there with my father, listening to him explain just where Oscar would feed his cattle and how they would do the haying in the summer, a question that I had never asked occurred to me. “How much time did you spend here when you were growing up?”

He smiled and said, “As much time as I could, at least every summer.”

“So you know pretty much everything there is to know about this, huh?” I asked, smiling back.

“No, not even close. There’s a lot that happened up here, a lot that matters. It would take a long time to find it out.”

I could tell he was remembering some of the things that happened, some of the things that mattered, as he gazed at the ranch below him. Not sure what to say, I didn’t speak for a moment. Then, breaking the silence, I said,

“Well, I would like to find some more out; it would make an interesting story.”

“Yes,” he replied, speaking slowly, “it would.”

Then he straightened up and took a drink, indicating it was time to move on. But before we started, he looked at me again, his eyes crinkling at the corners, “You know,” he said, “somebody should write it all down one of these days. Why not you?”

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My grandmother, Irma, met my grandfather, Hyrum, when he came to teach school in Greendale. Her sisters had been teasing her about not pursuing a handsome
ranch hand who had been interested in her. Not one to let opportunities pass her by, she retorted, “Just watch, I’ll marry the next tall, blonde, good-looking man that comes up here” (Irma Toone 2007). A few weeks later, Hyrum showed up on their front porch, tall and blonde, asking directions to the school. It didn’t take them long to become engaged, and in July of 1938, they were married. Soon after their marriage, they left the mountain, and began moving frequently as Hyrum looked for teaching jobs. Irma’s children, especially my father, felt the way Emma did before she moved to the ranch, longing for the stability that comes from staying in one place.

Born in March of 1943, my father was the third oldest of the nine children in his family. Though caring, his parents were often distant, concerned with providing for their children, including a physically handicapped son. He didn’t enjoy moving and always wished they could stay somewhere longer than a year. The one place my father felt at home was on the ranch with his grandparents. Every summer he would wait impatiently for the school year to end so he could go back to the mountain and find what was familiar. His grandmother would ask him how school was, offering him fresh baked bread. He followed his grandpa and Uncle Louis around, listening to their tall tales and stories, while learning how to rope calves, build fences, and mow hay.

The ranch had changed drastically by the time my father knew it. Most of the old settlers were gone, leaving some of their homes vacant. Orson Burton left in 1957 after his wife was dragged to death by a horse. The Greens had been gone for years, but the Arrowsmiths, one of the original ranching families, were still there, probably because Sylvan Arrowsmith married Mary Despain after her first husband, John, died of a heart attack at age thirty-five and she was alone for nine years, trying to keep her small farm
running and raise five children. Oscar and Emma’s other children were mostly grown and
married as well. Tom went to Idaho around the time he turned eighteen though he
returned and married Venna Moore, the daughter of one of the families in Manila. His
two sisters, Myrle and Merne, also married brothers from the same family. Idabell
married a man from Wyoming, and Wilda moved to Moab to go to college. There she
met Dale Irish, who convinced her to marry him, telling her he would take her with him
to see the world. They did travel, visiting at least every state in the U.S. and many
foreign countries. Afterward, they returned to Moab where they raised their children.
Louis, however, was still there. Only fourteen years older than my father, Louis was more
like my father’s brother. He didn’t marry until 1962, when Sandy Simonten, a pretty
divorcee with five children, came to the mountain to rent one of the homes the Swetts
owned.

The trend of the children moving away from the ranch was common among other
ranching families. Though the daughters worked alongside their fathers and brothers,
they never considered staying or taking over the operation one day. In order to find jobs,
go to college, and get married, they often had to move away. Their parents recognized the
necessity for their children to leave home, yet always expected them to return and visit
when they could. The ranch was the common meeting place as the family spread out, the
central location they could always find their way to back to.

Although their children were grown and gone, Oscar and Emma’s home was
rarely empty. Most of their grandchildren, like my father, begged to stay with them.
Louis said, “Kids and my dad were always together. They would have a hell of a time to
play with him when they came up” (Swett 1990). My father was no exception, and found
himself in the “hind pocket” of both Oscar and Louis, following them around during the
day, sleeping in the old two-room cabin with his cousins at night. It was exactly how my
father wanted to spend his summers.

After graduating from high school in 1962, my father spent the winter on the
ranch, helping Oscar and Louis with the cattle. Recognizing that my father needed some
direction in his life, Oscar encouraged him to join the military so he could get an
education. Taking his grandfather’s advice, he enlisted in the Marines, serving in
Vietnam for over a year. The ranch was one of the first places my father returned to after
he was discharged. His grandparents and their ranch were his home base, rooting him
during the uncertain early years of his life. They loved “Joe,” calling him by his middle
name, and always welcomed him back, no matter how long he had been gone or how far
away he had traveled.

The coming and going of their children and grandchildren wasn’t the only change
that came to the ranch. The family weathered the Great Depression with little personal
effect, in large part because of their self-sufficiency and minimal dependence on the
outside world. World War II brought prosperity, as it did for many cattle ranchers.
Because there were so many soldiers to be fed, the government offered an increased price
for beef. Electricity had moved from being a novelty to a necessity, and cars
unequivocally replaced horses and wagons. During this time, Oscar went to Vernal with
his friend, Orson Burton, to do some business. While there, he went to a local car
dealership and paid cash for a 1942 Chevrolet pick-up. He drove it home, surprising his
family, who didn’t know about his plans to buy a vehicle. The truck more or less replaced
the wagons on the family’s bi-annual trip to Vernal though they still used horses and
teams for the mowing and haying. The new truck was a tangible sign of the encroaching modernity and the Swett’s willingness to adapt to changes when necessary.

The Swetts slowly added electricity to the ranch, buying a Delco generator in the 1950s. Judy Blunt writes of the impact electricity had on small, family ranches in the 1960s: “While the coming of electricity fell short of some night to day miracle in the south country, it did inspire a rash of indoor improvements and brought us within sight of the twentieth century. With electric pumps at the well, pressure tanks and hot-water heaters began to appear, which led to the advent of kitchen sinks and bathtubs connected to hot and cold water. And eventually toilets” (25). The Swetts themselves enjoyed the benefits of modern plumbing. Oscar’s nephews convinced him to put in running water sometime during the fifties. Perhaps the most obvious advantage of indoor plumbing was realized when Oscar finally agreed to build a bathroom, but only as an attachment to the outside porch. He didn’t believe that having a bathroom in the house was sanitary. However, the bathroom was especially beneficial to Emma as she was growing older.

A photograph (figure 3), taken by my father in 1968, reveals the family’s adaptation to the modern world, combining technology with their way of life on the mountain.

![Figure 3 Emma Swett, 1968. By: Walter Toone](image)
The photograph shows Emma, sitting on the edge of the couch, speaking on the telephone, her arm resting on the dresser. When I see this photograph, forty years after it was taken, one of the first things I notice is how she is dressed. During the early years of the ranch she usually made her and her daughters’ dresses, seldom purchasing clothes. However, as they became more prosperous she began buying dresses from department stores or catalogs. No matter what was going on at the ranch, she always wore a dress, nylons and pumps. She also had her hair cut and permed by salons in Vernal. This counters the perception that ranch women were often dowdy or unkempt. Rather than being backwards and behind the times, she kept up with current styles and trends. However, she always wore an apron, indicating that although she frequently helped Oscar in the fields when she was needed, she spent most of her time in the home, cooking and cleaning, keeping things running behind the scenes.

Other crucial links to the outside world displayed in this photograph are the telephone, television, and radio. When Pearl Harbor was bombed on December 7, 1941, Oscar, Emma, and Wilda were listening to this radio and probably discussed what the world war would mean to their family. When President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, Oscar and Emma watched the events unfold on the small television set. When construction began on the Flaming Gorge Dam in 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson called the Swetts, who had the only telephone in the area, and asked them to inform the foreman that he had the approval of Washington DC to initiate the project (Swett Management Plan). After receiving the phone call, Oscar mounted his horse, rode to the site, and, in effect, delivered the message that would put an end to life on the mountain as they knew it.
The technology represented in this photograph not only kept them aware of events of national importance but are indications of their daily lives. While Oscar didn’t watch the television often, Emma frequently watched the evening news, staying up-to-date on current events. They also enjoyed listening to the Grand Ol’ Opry Sunday nights. While Oscar and Emma were able to stay connected to national and world events through their television and radio, the telephone is probably the most crucial link to the outside world. It is how Emma stayed in contact with her children, neighbors, and relatives. Though they enjoyed television and radio programs, the ability to stay close to their family and friends were probably what, more than anything, enticed Oscar and Emma to adopt the technology when it became available.

The Swetts sometimes slow adoption of modern technology is a model for how many rural families adapted to change. They first looked at usefulness and necessity before considering status or style. Neth writes of the differences behind the reasons rural versus urban families chose to adopt technology when they did: “Farm people wanted conveniences for reasons that often did not mesh with the ideals of middle-class consumption. Even advertisers […] developed different advertising strategies for rural markets […]. Advertisers promoting phones for rural markets featured practicality: finding out the market prices for livestock, grain, produce or poultry; calling doctors for medical emergencies” (201). Oscar especially was practical when it came to purchases. He only bought what he needed, regardless of the current trends. One of the only pieces of machinery he owned was his 1942 Chevrolet. He continued using horse operated equipment to maintain the ranch until it was sold.
These advancements, even the ones the Swetts enjoyed, came at a cost. As they soon found out, nothing can remain the same, and they were forced to adapt to the world around them. On April 11, 1956 Congress passed an enabling act to begin work on what was to be the Flaming Gorge Dam in Daggett County, Utah. The Bureau of Reclamation’s motive in building the dam was to use the Green River to provide water storage to maintain water flow at Lee’s Ferry, and by so doing they would be able to store water during the years when there was more rain and use that extra water to provide electricity that could be sold to power companies and eventually repay taxpayers (Durnham 333).

Greendale was not the only area affected by the building of dams during this time. Across the country the government was building more and more dams to provide electricity, recreation and jobs, beginning in the 1930’s with the Tennessee Valley Authority. The TVA was created by President Franklin D. Roosevelt as part of the New Deal, designed to provide jobs for those suffering from the Great Depression, to control flooding, as well as to make electricity more widespread and available to farms and rural areas. According to their website, the TVA provided the “electric lights and modern appliances that made life easier and farms more productive” and that the dams also “drew industries into the region, providing desperately needed jobs” (Tennessee Valley Authority). The effects of the dams were two edged. They did provide jobs and electricity, progress and modernity, all things that would become necessary for survival in our country. Society was moving away from agrarianism, and so individuals had to move with it in order to stay afloat in a new age of industry and electricity. The government was making it possible for outlying and rural communities to do just that.
On the other hand, the dams brought with them paved roads, tourists, government officials, and mechanization, forcing rural areas into modern culture while taking away the only lifestyle most farmers and ranchers were accustomed to, making them obsolete. Mechanization and electricity made it possible for larger corporations to produce much more quickly the same goods that had once been offered on a smaller scale by farmers and ranchers. Western writer and conservationist Edward Abbey offers a raw, if not realistic, view of what the dams offered besides electricity through his description of the Glen Canyon Dam, built the same time as the Flaming Gorge Dam: “This reservoir of stagnant water will not irrigate a single square foot of land or supply water for a single village. Its only justification is the generation of cash through electricity for the indirect subsidy of various real estate speculators, cotton growers and sugar beet magnates in Arizona, Utah and Colorado; also, of course, to keep the engineers and managers of the Reclamation Bureau off the streets and out of trouble” (134). Abbey’s view of the darker side of reclamation represents many of the feelings of the ranchers and farmers, who suddenly found themselves in the minority on the mountain among all the tourists, while not reaping any of the benefits promised by these dams.

One of these advertised benefits of the dam was providing jobs in the county that were not dependent on agriculture or ranching. Michael Johnson, a Daggett County historian, wrote of these promises: “When Flaming Gorge Dam was proposed […] its construction promised economic development to a region that could not provide many jobs for its young people. The dam, and the tourism associated with it, would certainly pump a great deal of money into the Daggett County economy, and it hopefully would allow many of the county’s young men and women to make a living without leaving
home” (252). The advantages of the dam were certainly attractive to some residents of the area, who were no longer able to make a living ranching or farming. It might provide the means to switch their focus from agriculture to tourism, and be able to stay where they were. A promotional brochure stated, “Welcome to Flaming Gorge Country. […] Only primitive roads lay across the eastern Uintas when construction of the Flaming Gorge Dam began in 1957. Dam construction, the development of the recreation area, and the construction of highways have ushered in the modern era for this ageless community” (Johnson 243). Though the government’s major motivation was not necessarily to “fix” the area, they were more concerned with the installation of the dam and production of electricity, their focus on what they saw as “improvements” to the community were used to sell the idea of the dam to local citizens.

The Flaming Gorge Dam, as part of the Colorado River Storage Project, was built in conjunction with three other dams, the Glen Canyon Dam, in southern Utah and northern Arizona, the Navajo Dam in New Mexico, and the Wayne N. Aspinall Dam in Colorado. The purposes of these dams were to provide water storage for direct use, control sediment and flooding, protect wildlife, create recreation, and provide a significant amount of electrical energy. The location for the Flaming Gorge Dam was chosen because it was at a major tributary to the Colorado River and it was in steep canyons, making construction more feasible (Reclamation 2009). However, the location they chose wasn’t empty; it was occupied by the small town of Linwood. Homes, ranches, stores and public buildings were abandoned and burned. Simultaneously a new community, Dutch John, was born in order to house the 3,500 workers that came to the area to work on the dam.
The cultural significance of this event cannot be overstated. Linwood represented the old, rural way of life, the center place for owners of small, family owned farms and ranches. It was the pulse that allowed those farms and ranches to exist by providing goods and contact with the outside world. By modern standards the town would have been viewed as Podunk or backward, but to the people living on the mountain Linwood was an important gathering place.

However, when “progress,” in terms of money, technology and recreation, needed to be made, an entire community was sacrificed in the process. Johnson wrote, “The filling of the reservoir and the building of recreational facilities had destroyed the community of Linwood, flooded spring pastures and closed off other areas to livestock grazing. […] Furthermore, increased property values tempted many ranchers to sell out, and their land became recreational property” (252). This explains the phenomenon described by Trimble, “Descendants of Pioneer families can become wealthy overnight by selling their land, but in the process they trade their personal and community identities for nothing more than a new real estate market. […] We reach in the hat and pull out—shazzam!-the New West” (233). While most descendants of the pioneer families in this area weren’t necessarily “made wealthy,” their community and personal identities were often traded for a new real estate market, whether or not they were willing.

The destruction of Linwood and establishment of Dutch John demonstrated the basis on which new communities were to be founded, industrialization rather than agriculture, modernity rather than tradition. The city of Dutch John stood in sharp contrast to the town it replaced and the communities that surrounded it. Greendale and Linwood were made up of families who had the common link of ranching or farming,
who had been there for years, sometimes decades, and whose work, personal lives, families, and friends, were all intertwined and connected. Dutch John, on the other hand, was made up of government employees who worked for hourly wages, stayed until the job was finished, then moved on to the next one. The disconnect between work and life occurred more often as people left the land to find jobs in offices or buildings. According to Jordan, this generation is “part of an exodus of over fourteen million people who have left the land” (15). This exodus from the mountain changed the dynamics of the neighborhoods, new and old, that remained on the mountain.

The mountain community my great-grandparents helped create was suddenly altering. To Oscar and Emma, the ranch represented stability and consistency, a place they rarely left and always returned to. However, the new breed of people that were moving up and down the mountain saw the ranch and the lifestyle it represented as a place to visit, stopping for a moment, always leaving, rarely returning. Hal Rothman explains how the changing society outside the mountain shaped and molded Greendale and the Swett Ranch into something that reflected it: “Western tourism sells us what we are, what we as a nation of individuals need to validate ourselves, to make what we want to be. In that process, we as tourists change all that we encounter. Making us what we want to be means shaping other places and people along with ourselves” (28). Because individuals, families, and communities have “come indoors” to make a living, as Jordan describes, the outdoors became a novelty, a luxury rather than a necessity to the general public (15).

While the dam provided jobs and improved the overall economy, its influence on the small ranches in the area was devastating. When asked how the dam affected his
family, Louis said, “Well, as far as the ranches, it ruined them. It just took them away. But as far as the outright economy, it probably brought more money to the county and stuff than anything that could have happened. Those tourists up there were going to spend a whole lot more money than we could have ever done. The economy of the country improved, I’m satisfied” (Swett 1990). Rowley writes of this changing relationship, stating, “New rules, demands, and legislation all meant more regulation. The mythical and romanticized ‘home on the range’ and the life of the ‘cowboy,’ that symbol of American ‘frontier’ freedom became increasingly enmeshed with federal rules and government land managers. The two groups often did not get along” (Rowley 113). What had once been an ideal, a rugged homesteader, taming the wild land, had, in a generation, become obsolete.

Oscar was not the only one who found himself in the midst of this emerging conflict. There were many family-owned ranches and farms that were sold or bought out by the government. Statistics demonstrate the changing times. According to Michael Johnson, “In the middle 1930s there were eighty-one farms […] in Daggett County. A government report […] stated, “the resources of the county principally are agricultural.” By 1970 there were only twenty-six farms in the county and total personal farm income was listed as $83,000. In comparison, nonfarm personal income was reported at $1,483,000, and personal income from government employment was $1,231,000. The importance of agriculture in the county economy had plummeted” (252). Other ranchers in the area either sold their ranches for below their value or lost them altogether. One rancher, Heber Bennion, was seventy-five years old in 1963, during the construction of the Flaming Gorge Dam. Because the government could pay higher wages, his ranch
hands left him to work on the dam. By this time, his children were grown and had moved away, unable to help. Realizing he could ranch no longer, he sold his ranch to a lawyer from the East, who later refused to pay. After a four-year court battle, he came to terms with losing his ranch, telling his granddaughter, “It’s okay we lost the ranch. The fun in life isn’t owning something, it’s the working hard to build it up. Our children have to find something of their own to build up” (Kirk and Walquist 83). Another rancher, Henry Williams, said, “The federal government told us that the ranch had to be sold. We really didn’t have much choice. After the government purchased it, we were able to ranch a few more years. Then the moving process began” (Kirk and Walquist 139). The moving process not only included moving off the mountain, but moving into an entirely different way of life.

Though Oscar wasn’t alone in his struggles against the government, it was still a very personal battle, intensifying after the dam was completed. Seemingly overnight campgrounds were built where he had previously grazed his cattle. Paved roads snaked up the mountain, turning the two-day journey to Vernal on horse into a forty-minute car ride. Tourists brought their boats, campers, binoculars, and cameras in order to catch a glimpse of nature and sometimes the past, which often included the ranch and people who lived there. Tourists pulled up in their cars as Emma hung laundry on the line or Oscar worked in his tool-shed. Unaware they were invading, these tourists often asked questions or walked around. Though Oscar and Emma weren’t opposed to visitors, they felt as though they and their home were “on display.” Mary, recalled that after the dam came in “they had so many people coming in and they didn’t respect a person’s farm or anything. They would just wade right through the hay and through the grain, whichever
way they wanted to go they went. It was pretty disgusting” (Arrowsmith 1989). Even before Oscar sold the ranch, it was already becoming a tourist destination, a relic of the past.

The convergence of the general public upon the mountain severely limited the places Oscar could graze his cattle, resulting in drastic cuts to his permits. Oscar had previously taken his cattle to the Dutch John flats, but it had been turned into the worker’s community. Also, a new National Recreation Area surrounded the lake. In a report for the Forest Service, historian Eric Swedin writes, “As part of this effort to provide an outdoor playground, campgrounds were built near Greendale, mostly around prominent springs. Cattle could no longer use the springs, and the loss of use of these public resources created problems for the Swett homestead. Rather than use the national forest land to winter his cattle on, Oscar now had to bring them in early and feed them the hay grown the previous summer. This changed the ranching economics of the homestead, foreshadowing an eventual decline” (Swedin 158-159). Tourists, not cattle, were what the Forest Service wanted on their land now.

Phil Johnson, a Forest Service employee at the time, explains the reasons behind the Forest Service’s unwillingness to grant Oscar more permits, saying that “[i]t was a scenic situation. Those campgrounds that were built there, money was provided to build those campgrounds along with the building of the dam and the creation of the national recreation area. You could build fences around Skull Hollow and Greendale Campground, but it really got to be a chore to maintain those fences all the time” (Johnson 2010). As a result, rather than build and maintain additional fences, the Forest
Service reduced Oscar’s grazing permits sharply, from 125 head of cattle to less than forty.

The changes were deeply felt by Oscar and Emma, who thought of the ranch not only as their livelihood but as something that represented their lives. When asked if his dad resented the dam, Louis replied: “Oh, yeah. He didn’t like them taking his outfit away from him, which more or less, that’s what happened. They just took it away. What he spent a lifetime building they took away in two years” (Swett 1990). However, the Swetts, and others like them, were certainly the majority no longer. Though the Forest Service’s guiding principle, “Where conflicting interests must be reconciled the question will always be decided from the standpoint of the greatest good of the greatest number in the long run,” initially benefitted Oscar and the early settlers in Greendale, it was turned inside out in the 1960s, when Oscar found himself on the other side of “the greatest number.” Though he had previously had few problems working with the Forest Service, his dissatisfaction with the government grew as his livelihood continued to be whittled down (Pinchot 11).

Stegner writes of the sometimes strained relationship farmers and ranchers have with the Forest Service because of their grazing regulations. He argues that watershed control and recreation are more important functions of western forests than anything that can be measured in board feet, because the culture as a whole had moved away from farming and ranching to recreation. He goes on to say, “Attacked or not, the Forest Service is not going to go out of business in the West, and neither are the other federal bureaus, because too many Westerners have come to depend on them” (Introduction The Sound of Mountain Water 35). Because it was the cattle business, not the Forest Service,
who would go out of business in the West, ranchers like Oscar, were left with few options concerning their land and found themselves confined by the bounds set the government.

Oscar soon recognized that it was no longer economically possible to continue ranching. Ironically, it wasn’t the World Wars, the Depression, or old age that led to the sale of the ranch, as it had been for so many of the other families in Greendale. In his case, it was simply progress, in the sense of tourists, recreation, and easy access. By 1968, when grazing restrictions reduced Oscar’s cattle to thirty-three, the sharpest restriction yet, he had determined it was time to move off the mountain. According to Wilda, the Forest Service offered to buy Oscar’s ranch from him for around fifty to seventy-five thousand dollars. Though I haven’t found evidence for this elsewhere, it follows the same trend of the Forest Service buying out other ranches in the area. However, Oscar was unwilling to sell to the Forest Service, either because he didn’t feel they were offering enough money or because, as Wilda said, “He was so mad at them, he just didn’t want them to have his ranch at all” (Irish 2010).

Around this time, developers began coming to the area, looking for places to buy and turn into resorts. A man named Heber Glenn bought Orson Burton’s ranch, with the intention of turning it into a resort. One of his friends, Mark Eggertsen, was also interested in purchasing land for himself. He met Oscar, and Eggertsen offered to pay him $500.00 per acre for his 397 acre ranch, totaling $198,500.00 (Swett Ranch Management Plan). Oscar felt this was a great deal and agreed to sell his ranch.

Eggertsen’s intended use for the land reflects the current trends of the time. He planned on building a resort, turning the land into a condominium complex with a golf course, equestrian area, and lodge. Had they materialized, these developments would
have dramatically changed the landscape of the mountain. The type of tourists who would have been attracted to this resort would have come to the mountain to be entertained or amused, with little appreciation for the natural beauty and heritage the mountain offered as it was. Eggersten agreed to let Oscar and Emma stay on the ranch and continue its operation until the sale was final.

Oscar was tired. He had worked hard every day of his life, rarely taking time off. He and his family had weathered the ebb and flow of ranching life, only to see it brought to an abrupt end. However, he continued getting up each morning, and going out to the fields to work, even if he wasn’t planning on remaining there much longer. It was his ranch, and he wanted to leave it the best he could.

One evening in September of 1968, he came in from the fields. After dinner, he said to Emma, “I feel tired, I think I’ll go to bed.” She said she would be there soon, after she threw the dishwater out. As she went to the front porch, she saw a porcupine chewing on a porch post. She called to Oscar, who came out and shot it. Louis heard the shot from his home and came to see what was going on. Oscar told him that “There was a porcupine trying to eat up my house, and I just couldn’t stand for that, so I shot him.” They visited for awhile, then Louis walked home and Oscar returned to bed. Emma went in soon after and heard him making a funny noise. She told him to roll over, but he didn’t respond. He was already gone. His daughter Mary simply said, “That’s an easy way to go after a hard life” (Arrowsmith 1989). His death occurred as the end of his way of life was coming. He had characteristically worked up until the very end, demonstrating that his ranch not only provided for his family, but distinguished Oscar and defined his life. The impending loss
of his land and his sudden death, though seemingly coincidental, are undoubtedly intertwined.

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The night after the hike with my dad I lay in my brother’s truck, shifting and sighing, unable to get comfortable, my Dad’s words, why not you? replaying in my mind. I agreed with him, somebody should write all of this down, make sure that it’s not forgotten, that Oscar and Emma aren’t turned into faceless representations of homesteading life. But me? True, I was getting my degree in English and the only one in the family who showed any interest in writing, but those things certainly didn’t qualify me for the task. I didn’t know Oscar and Emma, and I wasn’t that close to my grandmother. I had never even milked a cow or ridden a horse. There was no way I could possibly know enough to write about the ranch. I pushed the thoughts away, avoiding them like the gear shift in my back. However, the one thought I couldn’t escape from was that although I didn’t know much about ranching or horses, I knew my dad. I knew that these things mattered to him and made him who he is. He wouldn’t have been the same father to me without the ranch and his grandparents.

Maybe, I thought, one day I will write it down.

But I couldn’t worry about it just then; I had to get some sleep.
CHAPTER V
HOLDING THE PAST IN THE PRESENT

*Here the complexity of the land mirrors the complexity of the people*

- *Genevieve Atwood*

I managed to avoid writing about the Swett Ranch for a few years, all the while keeping it in the back of my mind. I graduated from the University of Utah in 2005 then went on a mission for my church from 2006-2007. When I returned, I knew I wasn’t finished with school, so I applied to the Utah State University graduate literature and writing program. I was accepted and soon moved to Logan from southern Utah.

I had some extra time my first semester, so I took an American Studies class from Melody Graulich. Though I had no background in American Studies, I enjoyed the subject and loved learning about tourism in the West. When it came time to write my final paper, I knew the Swett Ranch would be the perfect topic, combining many of the subjects we covered in class. I thought I would write the paper and be done with it. I was, however, wrong.

I continued researching the Swett Ranch for the next year and a half, intending to write my thesis about it. The summer after my first year of graduate school, my parents and I decided to hold a family reunion at the Swett Ranch to celebrate 100 years since Oscar and his mother filed a homesteading claim on the land. The first morning I returned home from Logan that summer, I began sifting through some of my parents’ old pictures of the ranch, some of which had been on shelves for the past thirty years. Most were taken at the beginning of my father’s photography career, while he was still a college student.
Though I had previously been researching the Swett Ranch, learning many things about my family I never knew, as I sifted through the photographs, some yellowed with age, I realized I didn’t really know these people I was writing about, they had yet to come alive for me. I felt overwhelmed at the prospect of trying to capture in words their lives and experiences, to accurately portray their characters and personalities. These were not my times, I thought, gently holding a faded, black-and-white photograph (figure 4) taken by my father in 1968, just before Oscar passed away.

![Figure 4 Oscar and Emma Swett, 1968. By: Walter Toone](image)

My parents were married in January of that year and made several trips to the ranch to see Oscar and Emma. This particular day my father asked if he could take a photograph of them before he and my mother left. Without hesitation, they agreed, and my father took what may be the last photograph of Oscar. What I noticed most about the photograph is how much my dad looks like Oscar. I have seen him pose for countless pictures the same way, hooking his thumb in his front pocket. He also has a similar worn-out cowboy hat, rimmed with sweat that he’s worn for as long as I can remember. Though I knew Oscar and my father were close, I never stopped to ponder how much my father imitated and emulated his grandfather.
It was always a strange thing to me that my father resembled his own father, physically or temperamentally, very little. Though he and my grandfather got along well, usually arguing back and forth good naturedly, they were very different. Because of health problems, my grandfather couldn’t farm or ranch and spent most of his life teaching or working in office jobs. He was also devoutly religious, never hesitating to bring up his beliefs to anyone.

My father, on the other hand, would rather be outside than anywhere else. After his photography career, he took a job at Zion National Park, spending most of his time on the trails that run through it. He often brought my brothers and me with him, sometimes pushing and sometimes pulling us up and down the hills. It was on these walks with my father through Zion, or wherever else he could find to hike that I really got to know him. He would point out plants and explain what they were. He knew the names of all the mountain ranges in the continental U.S., and could tell me everything I wanted (or didn’t want) to know about rock formations and the forces that created them. We talked about religion and spirituality, but always in more universal terms, not limiting our discussions to any one idea in particular.

I knew he had high expectations for us, that college wasn’t optional and shortcuts through life weren’t permitted, but an overriding sense of his love for us is what I remember most. We never doubted that no matter what path we chose, he would be on the sidelines, cheering us on in his own quiet way. Through connecting us with the outdoors he showed us, rather than told us, that there was no giving up, and no matter how long it takes, there is an end to the trail you are hiking. His dry sense of humor, optimism sometimes covered by a thin shell of pessimism, taste for simplicity, and
enduring work ethic are all things I know he inherited and passed on from the Swett Ranch.

Now, looking at the photographs he took of the ranch so long ago, after learning all I have, I can see my father reflected in them. Though he may not have realized it, what he chose to record in the split second it took him to push the button has helped determine how the ranch and his grandparents have been, and continue to be, interpreted and remembered. His photography is an example of John Berger’s assertion that “[a] photograph is a result of the photographer’s decision that it is worth recording, that this particular event or this particular object has been seen” (292). My father’s decision to record the ranch as it was then indicates his view that what he saw, though commonplace to him and the people who lived there, was significant and needed to be preserved.

My father’s preservation of the ranch as it was helps me not only understand Oscar and Emma and the people who lived there, but possibly most of all, him. Dorothea Lange writes of the connection between the photographer and his images, “Every image he sees, every photograph he takes, becomes in a sense a self-portrait. The portrait is made more meaningful by intimacy - an intimacy shared not only by the photographer with his subject but by the audience” (qtd. in Davis 92). My father’s photography allowed me, the audience, to see his grandparents and the ranch the way he did. The photographs breathe life into Oscar and Emma again, and as Ansel Adams writes, “These people live again in print as intensely as when their images were captured […]. I am walking in their alleys, standing in their rooms and sheds and workshops, looking in and out of their windows. And they in turn seem to be aware of me” (qtd. in Sontag 202). As I prepared for the reunion on the Swett Ranch, I used his photographs to teach and remind me of
why I was doing all this work. Emma, in her varying housedresses, often with a broom or in the kitchen, Oscar on his horse, or in front of his truck, slightly bowlegged and smiling a crooked smile, look back at me, asking to not be forgotten. Though the ranch is still there and family members and strangers continue to visit, the people behind the ideas are emerging from the shadows and teaching me some of the same things they taught my father.

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In 1970, two years after Oscar had passed away, Emma was still living on the ranch, with Louis close by, in his cabin about a quarter of a mile away. That summer, Louis and his family went on vacation for two weeks. Louis knew he couldn’t leave his mother alone, so he called my father. Without hesitation he agreed to come, even if it meant bringing my mother, his eight-month pregnant wife along.

One morning Emma rose early to feed the chickens. My parents were already up, my father helping with the chores.

“Grandma,” my father asked, as she headed to the house to clean up. “Would it be all right if I took a picture of you?”

“Well, I guess that would be fine,” she replied. “But just remember these are my chicken feeding clothes.”

With that, my father took one of the most memorable and oft used photographs of his grandmother and the Swett Ranch (figure 5).
In addition to being in many brochures and literature the Forest Service produces about the ranch, my father won a photography contest in the Salt Lake Tribune with this photograph, which captures Emma in her work clothes, layers of dresses beneath a flannel work shirt, gray hair pushing out of the scarf she has tied around her head. Her hands are clasped in front of her as she gazes unflinchingly at the camera. Her mouth is tight, as if she is anxious to get on to the next job, not wanting to take too much time for photographs.

My father’s decision to photograph his grandmother in this way allows the viewer to step behind the camera with him and see her the way he did. She was seventy-eight years old, yet still getting up in the morning to feed the chickens. The ranch must have been a lonely place by then, bereft of her children’s voices, Oscar’s projects, and visits from the neighbors. The memories probably seeped in on those quiet days, memories that kept her company as she watched the events that would force her from her home unfold. She is the only person in these photographs, yet standing in places where her family used to be. She and Oscar spent their early years in that cabin, along with their first three children, trying to establish themselves on the mountain. They lasted through freezing
winters, sleeping in one bed to stay warm, made it through the unending days of summer haying, feeding, and herding, always coming back at night to their little cabin. Now it was empty, with only the firewood to occupy it.

Another photograph (figure 6) taken the same time shows Emma from below, as my father points the camera up at her.

![Figure 6 Emma Swett, 1970. By: Walter Toone](image)

Emma appears larger than life, almost as tall as the roof of her white house in the background, with the chimney just to the right of her head. Her lack of teeth is obvious in this photo. She lost them just after she was married due to pyorrhea, a gum disease. Berger writes that what distinguishes memorable photographs from the most banal “is the degree to which the photograph explains the message, the degree to which the photograph makes the photographer’s decision transparent and comprehensible” (292). The simple composition of this photograph, my father looking up at her, allowing her face to fill the frame, focusing solely on his grandmother the way she was every morning, allows the purpose my father had in taking this photograph to come through. The viewer is able to see Emma as she was, without pretense. My father’s admiration and respect for his
grandmother is apparent in this photograph. This photograph is certainly an indication of something I’ve heard my father say more than once, that his grandparents were the “giants in his life.”

While Emma was quietly and consistently going about with her life, completing her daily tasks on the ranch, though uncertain about her future, the Forest Service became increasingly nervous as Mark Eggertsen’s plans for the developing the land began to surface. They worried that the condominiums, lodge, and equestrian area would take away from the “scenic, scientific, and historic, as well as, outdoor recreational benefits” (Swett Ranch Management Plan). The Forest Service attempted some informal negotiations with Eggertsen to obtain the land. However, when they were unable to reach a compromise, the Regional Forester requested approval to condemn the land, based on “eminent domain” which allows the government to seize land without the consent of the owner, after negotiations have been attempted. The government offered Eggertsen what they believed was fair compensation, $578.00 per acre, or $229,500.00 for the entire ranch. However, Eggertsen didn’t believe this was fair, and a court trial soon ensued.

Emma, Louis, and his family, left the ranch in 1970. Using some of the money from the sale of the ranch, Emma bought a small home in Vernal. However, she was never happy in the city and was homesick for her life on the mountain. She passed away in May of 1972, the same night some of her grandchildren graduated from high school. Just like Oscar, she had devoted her life to the ranch, their children, and each other. She lived long enough to see all of it change and her place in her world shift. Richard L. Evans, a radio producer and editor, spoke of the loneliness Emma must have experienced shortly before her death: “It is difficult for those who are young to understand the
loneliness that comes when life changes from a time of preparation and performance to a
time of putting things away […]. To be so long the center of a home, so much sought
after, and then, almost suddenly, to be on the sidelines watching the procession pass by-
this is living into loneliness […]. We have to live a long time to learn how empty a room
can be that is filled only with furniture” (Evans 1948). Emma had found her home on the
mountain, after wishing for it while she was young. Her longing for a home had been
satisfied for most of her life, only to be renewed in her old age.

While the ranch was still there the way she and Oscar left it, she couldn’t go back.
Emma had lived into loneliness, and, though she was surrounded by her children, she
often ached for the life she had left on the mountain. For sixty years she stayed on the
mountain, satisfied with the stability and constancy that she lacked in her younger years.
However, Emma had been displaced, uprooted, in the last days of her life, mirroring her
life before marriage.

Though the relationship between the Forest Service and the Swetts had been a
tenuous one, with the sale of the ranch to Eggersten, the Forest Service found themselves
in a more difficult situation. While they didn’t want Oscar’s ranching business to
interfere with their tourists, Eggersten’s development provided an even less desirable
alternative. Rather than dealing with the huge numbers of tourists and complete overhaul
of the Swett Ranch, the Forest Service wanted to turn land into something that would be
useful for the general public, without completely altering the land.

A document from the Forest Service explained they wanted to seize the land in
order to “protect a significant pastoral scene within the Flaming Gorge National
Recreation Area from commercial development and to preserve a significant historical
site (pioneer homestead)” (Swett Ranch Management Plan). Also, a letter written advocating the purchase of the ranch from Eggetsen details why such a purchase would be beneficial to the public: “The property represents sixty years of man living in harmony with the land. As such, it affords the opportunity to show man’s dependency upon the land and his need for the natural resources, using the appealing story of life on a frontier homestead” (Navratil 1971). The Swett Ranch provided not only a physical representation of ranching life, but a narrative to frame the story. Oscar became a representation of the “man,” fulfilling the American dream, living on his own land, using what he needed from the nature that surrounded him. His wife and children provided part of the equation of an “appealing story of life on a frontier homestead.”

Through representing Oscar and Emma in this way, the Forest Service sought to appeal to visitors who were doing, essentially, the opposite of what Oscar and Emma did. The tourists would stop for a short time, a couple of hours at the most, learn some of the facts, before moving onto the next activity. They would leave their footprints, but not much else. Most visitors would probably be from cities and work indoors. If there were some from rural areas, the type of ranching and farming they did was probably drastically different from Oscar and Emma’s techniques. The mere function of the ranch as a visitor’s center highlights the contrast between Oscar and Emma’s life just a generation before. Oscar and Emma rarely went on vacation or did anything solely for recreation. It’s difficult to imagine them having the time to visit a place similar to what their own home would become.

In order to protect the homestead from developers and open it up to visitors, the Forest Service entered into informal negotiations with Eggersten between 1970 and 1972.
However, they were unable to come up with a compromise and so the Forest Service condemned the site. On June 1, 1972 the U.S. government officially took the title to the property. Eggersten demanded compensation in the amount of three million dollars, claiming that in 1963, with the completion of the dam, the value of the land switched from agricultural to recreational, increasing the land’s desirability because of its accessibility to tourists and developers. Other developers were called to testify, some claiming that they would spend up to $8,000.00 an acre for the land. The jury eventually awarded Eggersten $595,425.00 for the land, $1500.00 per acre, three times as much as he paid Oscar (Swett Ranch Management Plan).

The dramatic events surrounding the court trial and acquisition of the land by the Forest Service sharply contrast the circumstances in which Oscar began homesteading the land 60 years earlier. Far from being in high demand, the land was seen by the government as not desirable for development or foresting and therefore the government was willing to let it be opened to homesteaders. However, because the value of the land was no longer based on farming or ranching but instead proximity to the dam and its contribution to increased tourism, the government and Eggersten were both willing to pay huge sums of money to use the land for their purposes. The Forest Service’s views of the ranch as a historical site are also significant because it had been run as a ranch just a few years earlier and could possibly have continued to be operated had not outside forces contributed to its sale.

However, its historicity came not because of how old it was, but because of the way of life it represented, a culture that was rapidly disappearing from mainstream America. A document from Forest Service details exactly what the potential was that they
saw in the Swett Ranch, listing reasons such as, “The former owner and original homesteader worked the property for almost sixty consecutive years,” and “The property was developed almost exclusively with horse-drawn equipment” (Navratil 1971). What Oscar had done subconsciously simply staying in one place and running his ranch the way he had from the beginning, became an anomaly to the outside world. More than anything else, it was Oscar’s stability and constancy reflected in his ranch, which contrasted the movement and of rapid change of society, that made the ranch unique.

In 1979 the Swett Ranch became a National Historic Site. According to the National Register of Historic Places website, “The National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic and archeological resources” (Loether). Lee Skabelund, the Forest Service employee over the volunteers at the Swett Ranch, said he wanted it preserved as a historic site because, “You can’t dismantle or get rid of it unless you write a total evaluation. You have to measure it, document it, photograph it, everything if they were to take anything down” (Lee Skabelund Interview 2010). Phil Johnson said, “What Lee Skabelund did was extremely important [to preserve] the lifestyle and how people lived under those conditions. I am glad it’s in the public domain” (Phil Johnson Interview 2010). The fact that the Swett Ranch is still on the mountain, as it is, is due in large part to Skabelund’s efforts to turn it into a National Historic Site, securing it a place among sites such as the Statue of Liberty, the St. Louis Arch, and the Gettysburg Battlefield.

Now visitors are taken on a tour through the white house that was built in 1929, shown the old farm equipment used by Oscar, and allowed to explore the barns,
blacksmith shop and spring house. The people who go to the ranch don’t go to be entertained, amused, or pampered; they go to learn about their history and culture. Although the resort Eggersten envisioned would have brought tourists as well, those tourists would have completely changed the face of the land and little of the ranch’s historical value would have remained. However, by creating a “time capsule” the ranch appeals to people who don’t want to change or develop it, who are drawn by the sense of timelessness and memories it evokes for the older generations, as well as viewing it as an opportunity to teach younger generations what life was like on a ranch in the early twentieth century. Even the brochure, now available to tourists at the ranch, seems to be dripping with the nostalgia the Forest Service is eager to create. The cover of it reads:

Does it seem curiously quiet here? It was not always so. The buildings and rusting farm instruments you see tell us that at one time this place hummed with human activity: the clang of a blacksmith’s hammer, the laughter of running children, the call to supper after a long day of hard work. We invite you to take a short walking tour of this ranch, begun in 1909 by Oscar and Emma Swett. Consider how your life today compares with that of this American family. (McKnight)

However, the ranch itself creates a paradox. While being touted as a place that “remains the same,” and a reference point between our lives today and the “old way of life,” its current function as a visitor center is in fact a testament to the fact that nothing can remain the same. The value of the ranch itself now has nothing to do with land or cattle, but lies in what it can offer in terms of tourism, just like the mountain on which it is built. The very need for people to go to a visitor center or historic site in order to see
ranching equipment, a blacksmith shop, barns and cabins, represents just how far away our society as a whole has moved from agriculture, farming and ranching in only the past forty years.

Just as the ranch Oscar owned changed over the sixty years he owned it, it continues to transform, shifting and moving, molding itself to what the Forest Service deems as serving the greatest public good. This past year, our family has had close contact with many of the current and former Forest Service employees, something that has not happened for years. As a result we have been able to see the caring individuals who have devoted themselves to the preservation of the ranch, although it’s a difficult feat in the face of budget cuts and limited funding. Although it is a National Historic Site, the Swett Ranch receives little federal funding. Other than Kay Potter, the Forest Service employee who supervises the ranch, all work is done by volunteers, many of whom come from all over the country to spend their summer conducting tours and maintaining the ranch. With the economic recession of the late 2000s, budgets have been cut even further, only allowing the ranch to be open to the public minimally throughout this summer season. If this trend continues not only my family will be affected, but so will the hundreds of people who visit the ranch from all over the country each summer. My father and his generation will soon be the last ones who remember the ranch when it was actually a working ranch.

My siblings and cousins now go to the ranch in the summer, generally for reunions and parties. What we see and understand of the ranch is connected to our parents and grandparents. Although the historical accuracy of what is presented may be debatable, the ranch provides an important link to the generations, not only in my family
but connecting other people to their ancestors who had similar experiences. Even if what is seen is not entirely understood by future generations of my family or visitors to the ranch, it is crucial that they at least see it, that there is a place to go, to stand in, to remember not only my great-grandparents, but others like them. Though describing the wilderness, Stegner’s words are appropriate for the Swett Ranch: “We need wilderness preserved […] because it was the challenge against which our character as a people was formed. […] It is good for us when we are young, because of the incomparable sanity it can bring briefly, as vacation and rest, into our insane lives. It is important to us when we are old simply because it is there--important, that is, simply as an idea (The Wilderness Letter). Though it is not wilderness any longer, the Swett Ranch represents the result of Oscar successfully challenging himself against the outdoors. I have seen how the Swett Ranch takes on different meanings to different people at varying stages in their lives. To the young it offers a place away from the world, where they can learn the “trick of quiet,” and see the challenge which formed their ancestors. To the old, who remember when ranching wasn’t history, but life, it offers a place to return, where their memories still live, whether or not they had ever heard of Oscar and Emma Swett before stumbling upon the ranch (The Wilderness Letter).

In essence, my extended family’s sometimes strained relationship with the Forest Service has come full circle. As difficult as it was for the family members of Oscar and Emma to watch the decline and acquisition of the ranch by the Forest Service, they have come to understand that these changes couldn’t be stopped or avoided, that one way or another their family would have to leave the mountain. By purchasing the ranch, the Forest Service did something my family could not have done. They preserved the
physical ranch for future generations, Oscar and Emma’s posterity, as well as the general public, making the way of life Oscar and Emma led, as well as the lessons to be learned from the ranch, less theoretical and more concrete and tangible. We have found ourselves on the same side as many of the Forest Service employees again, recognizing that there are individuals who care deeply about the Swett Ranch and its future.

Though there are some Forest Service employees who see little value in the continuation of the Swett Ranch as a tourist destination, who don’t “want to see volunteers spend their time there when they should be out doing other things,” there are many who continue to keep it running, despite budget cuts and opposition from their superiors (Phil Johnson Interview 2010). Stegner writes of the various individuals who make up the Forest Service as a whole, stating, “As I have known them, most of the field representatives of all the bureaus, including the BLM, do have a sense of responsibility about the resources they oversee, and a frequent frustration that they are not permitted to serve them better” (The American West as Living Space 43). Kay Potter, Phil Johnson, and Lee Skabelund are all examples of employees who have devoted their work to the preservation of the Swett Ranch. Through keeping it open to family members and tourists alike, Oscar and Emma’s character, and the challenge they were formed against, will continue to influence the countless individuals who have left their footprints on the ranch carved out of the mountainside.

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The silver BMW pulled into the dusty drive-way, the driver already rolling down her window. Everyone else seemed to busy visiting and reminiscing, so I approached the visitors, knowing they were probably wondering what was going on. It was July 2009,
and my family and I were at the family reunion we had been planning for over a year. Groups of my family members were scattered over the ranch, sitting on blankets or in lawn chairs, pictures and letters on the ground in front of them.

“Hi,” I said as I reached the car. “How are you today?”

“Great,” the visitor responded. “Is this the Swett Ranch?”

“It is. Would you like to take a look around? I’d be happy to show you,” I said, excited at the thought of being an unofficial tour guide of the Swett Ranch.

The visitors were two slightly older women, friends from New Hampshire, with expensive sunglasses and cameras. They came to the Flaming Gorge Dam, saw fliers about the Swett Ranch, and decided to stop by. I happily showed them the two cabins, white house, and other buildings. They especially liked the rootcellar, remembering their mothers and grandmothers talking about keeping their food in similar places. Their response to the ranch was enthusiastic and genuine. “You must be proud to have this in your family,” they said as they left. “You’re very lucky to be a part of this.”

I agreed, as I watched the BMW drive down the dust filled road toward the highway. I was lucky to be a part of the ranch, to be able to connect my great-grandparents to people who seemed to appreciate their lives. I also thought of how different my reaction to the visitors was than Oscar and Emma’s while they were still living on the ranch. Though Oscar and Emma were friendly to the tourists, it is easy to understand their resistance to becoming part of the attraction of Flaming Gorge. To them, tourists symbolized the end of the ranch and the mountain as they knew it.

Now, the continuation of the ranch is almost entirely dependent upon tourists, like the women from New Hampshire. Tourists are the reason the Forest Service keeps it open
and running, summer after summer. Instead of Oscar and Emma’s family reluctantly answering their questions and giving directions, or asking them not to trample down the grass, we welcome them, inviting them to walk down the paths and look into the rooms where Oscar and Emma once lived. We realize the reason the ranch remains preserved and open to the public is so people can do what Oscar and Emma once resisted, peek into their homes and workshops, marveling at what life was once like. Later that evening I thought of what I had told the women from New Hampshire about the ranch. I knew that many of my family members didn’t know much of what I had told the visitors. In addition to telling strangers about my great-grandparents, I realized I was also a link to my family, connecting them to Oscar and Emma.

Because this was probably one of the only times so many descendants of Oscar and Emma would be together, my parents and I decided to have a program after dinner, inviting different family members to speak. I thought this was a great idea until my parents insisted that I be one of the first speakers, sharing the research I had done and giving an overall background to the ranch. It was then that I began to question the necessity of a program.

As I approached the microphone, my hands trembled, rattling the paper I was holding. I attempted to push my anxiety from my mind, as I looked out over the diverse group of people finishing their dinners of chili and fry-bread, waiting for the program to begin. Many of my aunts and uncles were there, along with their children and grandchildren. I saw my dad’s cousins, most of whom I met for the first time that day. In addition, descendants of Emma’s sister, Sophie, who returned frequently to stay with Oscar and Emma when her family was struggling, were also there. My eyes finally found
my family, my parents, brothers and sisters. They smiled, and I managed a faint smile back. Gathering courage, I took a deep breath and started to speak.

I began with a short explanation of how my project came about and gave a basic history of the ranch, discussing the major events that characterized the Swett’s life on the mountain. I concluded by saying, “I’ve really come to love my great-grandparents. I love them for what they taught my grandmother and my father, how it’s helped him become the person that he is. Even though the people who lived here originally are gone, we can still learn the same things from the ranch.” At this point, I purposely avoided meeting my father’s eyes, because I knew it would just make the tears that were threatening to come, spill over. After all my reading and learning about Oscar and Emma, it was in that moment that I could picture them, and it seemed they were nearby. I couldn’t help but wonder if they were pleased with this gathering, glad we were making an effort to remember them, as we discovered the individuals beneath the surface.
CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

And I have been personal because the West is not only a region but a state of mind, and both the region and the state of mind are my native habitat.

- Wallace Stegner

Writing this thesis has been a personal experience for me, and making it personal was the only way to make it true. Though I understand that I don’t know everything there is to know about Oscar and Emma, ranching, land policy, or tourism in the West, I at least know why it all matters. My great-grandparents have provided a place for me to keep coming back to, physically or otherwise, to take a deep breath, gather strength, and keep going. Since my family’s initial move to Hurricane in 1988, I have continued to live in various places, usually for short amounts of time as I’ve gone to college and worked. Yet the ranch is always there. It’s comforting to know that Oscar, Emma, and their ranch will continue to exist within me, no matter how often I make it back to Greendale.

On the last day of the reunion, my sister, some of her children, and I stood in the old rootcellar. We talked about all the things they used to keep in it, the fruits and vegetables, and how often they probably ran to it, pulling something out, like we do with the refrigerator. As I looked toward the door, I saw my six-year-old niece, Emily, crouched down, gazing at something in the distance. I pulled out my pocket-size Nikon and snapped a picture (figure 7).
I’ve usually left the photography to my father, but in a split second, I saw something in Emily’s pose that made me want to record it. As I looked at it later, I realized what it was. Emily is the great-great granddaughter of Oscar and Emma. One hundred years after Oscar came to the mountain and carved out his homestead, his children and descendants are still converging on the ranch, making their own memories. However, this time, I am the one with the camera. Just as my father was the link, allowing me to understand Oscar and Emma and appreciate them as people through his photography, I need to be that link, distilling the information I have gleaned about the ranch to my family members, especially the younger generation. I don’t want the way they remember the ranch to be simply as a playground, a family reunion site, relying on the plaques and brochures to provide them with information about their ancestors. I hope that my nieces and nephews will discover Oscar and Emma the way I have, and see how their influence has continued well past their deaths.
Most of the family members of Oscar and Emma live far away from the ranch, only making it back occasionally. Some live in Wyoming, some in Southern Utah, some in California, and others further away. Brandon Schrand’s observation of his own family’s changing dynamics also describes the Swett’s movement away from the core of their early lives: “The irony is unavoidable. A family who sought for so many years to find their place of belonging—and who eventually found it, and claimed it as their own—would fall away from its center. If a single reason is ever given for the disconnect, it usually has something to do with ‘all the tourists’” (77). While it’s not possible to completely sum up in one or two words all the forces that moved the family away from the mountain, others moving in were certainly a factor in their displacement. Yet, though they don’t live there any longer, the surviving Swett children still look at the ranch as “home.”

After moving to Vernal when the dam was completed, Mary Arrowsmith wrote a poem called “Our Mountain Home.” She began and ended with poignant stanzas, voicing the fear that the lives of those who built the ranch would be forgotten: “Now that we’re old and looking grim/ How we grieve to see the people move in/ For once this mountain all covered in pine/ With meadows and valleys—all seemed to be mine.” “But I guess in days to come/ Our mountain home will all be fun/ For city folks do not care/ How much hard work we’ve put here.” Mary’s major concern doesn’t seem to be that they weren’t living on their land any longer, but that people would simply stop caring, even their descendents, and only see the ranch as “fun.”

A statement by Mary Clearman Blew came into focus as I read Mary’s words and pondered my responsibility: “I am who I am because of these men and women and the
stories they told, and as I write about them, they live and breathe again through the umbilical tangle between character and writer” (Bone Deep in Landscape 6). In a very real sense, I exist because of my great grandparents. The line from ancestor to descendant, from grandparent to grandchild, is easy to follow, but the line that goes the other direction, grandchild to grandparent, is not as obvious. However, the photograph of Emily through the doorway of the root cellar, reminds me that the story of the Swett Ranch is far from over. Emily is on the threshold, learning about the past and moving towards the future, while occupying the same space Oscar and Emma once did.

One conclusion that I’ve come to through all of my research is that the continued presence of Oscar and Emma in my life, and the lives of my family members, is dependent on the space I carve out for them, as I read their words and stand where they stood, just as Emily was, inviting their memories back into life. All I can promise Mary Arrowsmith is that there is at least one person who will not forget nor cease to care about the hard work, love, and life they used to build the ranch. Though unwittingly, Oscar and Emma have helped shape my life, and so now it is up to me to return what they have given me, in some small way, and become an advocate for not only the preservation of the ranch, but also the memory of their lives. In this way, they become products of my life and my choices. It is my decision to discover and get to know them, the people I never met, but who have helped me become who I am.

Arrowsmith, Mary Elizabeth Swett, and Sylvan. Interview by Carol Zubrickas, Arrowsmith home, Greendale, Utah, 26 June 1978. Print.


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