

Surrey Ridge History

This unofficial history of Surrey Ridge was researched and written by Amy Flanagan of Surrey Ridge Estates. It was originally published in the Surrey Sentinel edited by Amy and her husband, Dave, in eight installments between October, 1998 and May, 2000.



Surrey Sentinel

Published Occasionally for the Lot Owners of Surrey Ridge & Surrey Ridge Estates by Amy & Dave Flanagan.

Way Back When – Part I

from the Oct 1998 Surrey Sentinel Vol. 5 Issue 6



Happy Canyon Ranch sign at Exit 190 (now closed)

And now for something completely different...some history of Surrey Ridge and the surrounding countryside. Amy has been busy gathering information from old newspaper articles, books, deeds, the Douglas County Historical Society, local realtors, an occasional bartender, and our neighbors that have been living here since the beginning of Surrey Ridge

In this installment we learn why Exit 191 is the Schweiger Exit and how Happy Canyon was named...

The first documented, non-native, settlers of Surrey Ridge were John H. Craig, Jack Johnson and Charles Holmes who settled in the pine hills 10 miles north of Castle Rock in 1859. They raised cattle and mined for gold and silver. After a particularly hard winter that year they left the area. John Craig went to Oakes sawmill in Riley Gulch (south of Daniels Park) and later became owner of what is now Sedalia and a founder of Castle Rock.

In the 1860s, the first permanent settlers in our area were the Schweiger brothers (John Sr., Joseph, and Jacob) and their mother. They lived in a small two-room house on the eastern side of I-25 near exit 191. From Mrs. Rose Tuggle, 94 year old daughter of John Schweiger, Jr. (The Express—March 5, 1980) comes the story of how this area was named Happy Cañon (the original Spanish for Canyon).

The Schweiger brothers and other ranchers ran cattle in the area that spanned from present day Beverly Hills (Exit 188) to County Line Road, west to Daniels Park, and east of I-25. One of the original settlers, Jack Johnson, returned to this area and lived for about a year in a small cabin north of Surrey Ridge. Ranchers would hear his beautiful singing as he worked and rode over the hills. Jack's singing was missed after a time and when John Schweiger went to look for him, he found Jack had left the area never to return. A few months after that, visitors from back east asked John Schweiger the name of this beautiful area. At this point, the area hadn't been named, so John suggested the name Happy Cañon (after Happy Jack) to agreeable area residents. The creek running through today's Surrey Ridge was called Happy Cañon Gulch. Jack Johnson's small cabin was later turned into a schoolhouse, appropriately named Happy Cañon School. No evidence of this school remains today.

Way Back When – Part II

from the Jan 1999 Surrey Sentinel Vol. 6, Issue 1

In this installment, we again discuss the Schweigers and introduce Art Ceresa.

John Schweiger, introduced in Part I of this series, married Anna Engle, niece of Upper Lake Gulch pioneer George Engle. They moved from the two room homestead (possible remains exist on the Bluffs) John shared with his mother and two brothers, into the big farmhouse still standing east of Exit 191. John and Anna had seven children.

Over the years John Sr. acquired many acres and built a large ranch. In 1925, John Sr. died and sons John Jr. and Max continued to farm and ranch. They purchased more land; some for as little as \$2.50 per acre.

Another major area landholder was Arthur Ceresa, who came to the U.S. from Austria (or Germany) before WWI with his cousin, Herman. Art and Herman bought pieces of the Happy Canyon Ranch on both sides of I-25. They began cattle ranching and built a ranch house – the big two story white house on the west side of Clydesdale at exit 190. Herman eventually built a house on the east side of exit 190 and moved there. Art married Mary, had a son, successfully ranched, and continued buying sections of land. Over the years, Ceresa and the Schweigers traded, purchased, and sold sections of land to consolidate their holdings.

Eventually Art Ceresa owned all of present day Surrey Ridge and Estates, and most of Oak Hills, stating he purchased the land for an average cost of \$6.25 per acre.

Stay tuned, our next installment describes untimely deaths, possible murder, and the sell out to realtors – info not available in history books, but provided and collaborated by several original residents of Surrey Ridge!

Way Back When Part III

from the Mar 1999 Surrey Sentinel Vol. 6, Issue 2

In the last installment we learned that Arthur Ceresa owned all of today's Surrey Ridge and Estates and most of Oak Hills. What happened to Art?

Art Ceresa and his wife Mary, a gracious woman, owned and operated the Happy Canyon Ranch headquartered west of today's decaying

Happy Canyon Ranch sign. The Ceresas lost their only child, a son, in his early 20s due to an untreated illness because Mary withheld medical attention. She was skeptical of doctors. This left Art a bitter man.

In the 1960s, the Ceresas had a live-in Swiss/German maid named Luzi. Luzi spoke limited English and was vocally disappointed in the outcome of WW II!

The Ceresas sold the ranch in 1965 to the Medima developers and the Alsum brothers. They got \$1100 per acre and became even wealthier. Following this sale, Ceresa got nervous about perspective neighbors being too close. He bought back the lots on each side of his ranch house for a tremendous amount of money.

Mary Ceresa passed away about 1970. Luzi continued to live with Arthur and married him in ~1975.

During these years, Art's cousin, Herman, ranching on the eastern side of Exit 190 financially supported family members in Austria/Switzerland. These relatives were slated to inherit Herman's land. During this

period in the mid-70s Herman was found in his yard, dead of a gunshot wound. It was suspected, but never proven, that Luzi killed him. Property taxes became due on Herman's estate. The Swiss relatives were unable to pay or were unaware of these taxes. Art paid the back taxes and as a result, took ownership of all Herman's land.

Ceresa was about 90 years old when he died in 1985. Luzi inherited all Ceresa's money except 10 acres he bequeathed to a loyal ranch worker. Luzi was furious about these 10 acres. She took the entire estate, provided nothing to other Ceresa family members and moved back to Europe.

Way Back When Part IV

from the Oct 1999 Surrey Sentinel Vol. 6, Issue 3



Part III of this series generated both positive and negative response. One of our neighbors forwarded our historical accounting to Leonard and Carol Dietz in Commerce City. Mr. Dietz is the nephew of Art and Mary Ceresa. Leonard spent a great deal of time with his Uncle Art on the Happy Canyon Ranch. He graciously provided these corrections on Ceresa family history.

Herman Miller (Art's cousin) who ranched the eastern side of I25 at today's Exit 190 was nearly blind and about age 80 when he was found dead. The family believes Herman took his own life because he was having increasing difficulty with his progressive blindness.

On a trip home to Switzerland, Art and Mary Ceresa hired Luzie, an East German, and brought her to this country to help Mary with household chores. Luzie was a hard worker in the house and around the ranch. Following Mary's death, Luzie married Art and took excellent care of him until his death at about age 95.

The editors of the Surrey Sentinel thank Mr. Dietz for his interest, time, and photo.

Way Back When Part V

from the Aug 1999 Surrey Sentinel Vol. 6, Issue 4

In the years between Art Cerresa idyllic life and the start of the Surrey Ridge community what was here?

As you drive north on I25, fighting the rapidly increasing traffic and constantly rearranged construction barriers, did you ever notice the overgrown, eroded remains of a dirt road on your right? Imagine back 50+ years ago...this was a section road used by dairy farmers and ranchers called Happy Canyon Rd.

In those days, Hampden Ave. bounded the southernmost suburb of Denver. Travelling south, only open cattle country, a few ranches, and occasional alfalfa fields existed until you reached Castle Rock. There was a dance hall / roadhouse near the current Surrey Ridge picnic area. Ranchers and their families used this roadhouse for community activities. The hills were free of today's pervasive power lines until about 1946 when power was first brought to Northern Douglas County.

From Denver, southbound travelers had a choice of taking Rt. 85 to Castle Rock, or for the adventuresome, Happy Canyon Rd which ran from Hampden (near today's Happy Canyon Shopping Center) south to Happy Canyon Ranch, then veered west and dead-ended at Daniels Park Road. There's a sign marking Old Happy Canyon Road on Buffalo Ridge near the new Buffalo Drive. Travelers could continue southwest on Daniels Park Road, then called Riley's Hill, down to Rt. 85 and on to Castle Rock.

The traffic from Denver to Castle Rock changed dramatically in 1952 with the construction and opening of I25. As I sit in stop-and-go traffic on I25 and I see that deserted old dairy road, I wonder if our quality of life has really improved in the last 50 years?

By the way, Surrey Ridge was never called Rattlesnake Ridge, though the early settlers battled many rattlesnakes.

Way Back When Part VI

from the Oct 1999 Surrey Sentinel Vol. 6, Issue 5

The horse drawn surrey was first built in Surrey County, England. Surrey is a rural suburb of southern London (for those who can afford it). The portion of Surrey within the M25 Motorway has little natural and virtually no historical appeal, being a collection of satellite towns, though an enjoyable day may be spent at the racecourses. Further from London, Surrey takes on a more pastoral demeanor with the

county's only intact castle at Farnham. ...*Hmm, M25... I25, rural southern suburb, pastoral demeanor... coincidental analogy between SR and Surrey England?*

Surrey Ridge Units 1 and 2 were platted March 31, 1966, attested by Frank Randall, Vice President of Equestrian Properties, Inc. and by Arthur and Mary Ceresa. Surrey Ridge Units 1 and 2 included Clydesdale Road, Palomino Drive and a short portion of Surrey Road. Today's picnic area and riding arena were included as wilderness areas. Surrey Ridge's first 2-acre lots were priced at \$5000 with a \$500 rebate for starting a structure within 6 months.

What were they thinking? Developers envisioned a strong market for these 2-acre lots if they could create a distinctive horse community. In nearby Happy Canyon, residents were required to keep horses in community barns. The SR developers hoped a unique horse community, with individual barns on private lots, would attract buyers. Developers got permission for Public Service easements to be community bridle trails. Each 2-acre lot was allowed 2 horses. The name "Surrey Ridge" was part of this overall image with all neighborhood street names reinforcing the horse theme.

These distinctions did indeed lure buyers to Surrey Ridge. The first year following platting, Henry and Helen Wells (today's residents at 9524 Surrey Road) purchased land here, and with their children and horses were the first residents of the new SR. During the next year, five houses and barns sprung up along Surrey Road, Palomino and Clydesdale. In the late 1960s, the Wells, Genschs, Davilas and Jensens cleared trees and underbrush in the wilderness area and constructed the first horse arena in the area. Many holiday celebrations included rodeos with contests for all hardy riders.

By 1973, there were 44 residences and additional 46 non-resident landowners in Surrey Ridge. Of course, the streets were dirt roads. Surrey Road ended in a cul-de-sac at Corral with a fence surrounding an open pasture (today's SRE). Many SR equestrians rode this pasture and the hills up to Daniel's Park.

Next: It was a real gully washer (1973); with horses providing the only transportation ... and ...Dorothy and Toto funnel through SR on an eerie green afternoon (1985).

Way Back When Part VII

from the Dec 1999 Surrey Sentinel Vol. 6, Issue 6

Flood... Heavy rain hit Saturday night, May 5th and Sunday, May 6, 1973, on land already saturated with winter snowmelt. The creek culverts were much smaller then and they were completely blocked by mud and debris. Almost six inches of rain fell in less than 24 hours, wrecking havoc in Surrey Ridge, Daniels Park and along West Plum Creek to the south and west. Happy Canyon Creek through Surrey Ridge

surged over its banks and covered the frontage road with several feet of water. The gully north of Stirrup Lane also washed out. Surrey Ridge was stranded!

That evening, kids and adults saddled up the horses and ferried homecomers across the raging waters. Cars found high ground at the exit where they remained for several days.



Tornado...

“Tornado rips luxury homes in Surrey Ridge,” exclaimed the Rocky Mountain News headline. Many of us were home and will never forget that late Friday afternoon – July 19, 1985. There were no warnings, no sirens, no SuperDoppler on weather stations. The air was calm, nothing out of the ordinary so far that day. At about 4 P.M. the sky turned eerily green. A huge black cloud snaked toward Surrey Ridge from the northwest. Long after the Wizard of Oz but well before the days of Twister, we somehow knew exactly what approached.

The tornado first touched down in the Olson’s (then Sutton’s) yard and quickly skipped to the Flanagan’s rooftop, sheering the top shingles, sucking out windows, and depositing their Hobie Cat atop a brand new Saab. It moved down the hill exploding almost all of the windows in the Clarke’s (then Lentz’s) house, snapping a stand of original Surrey Ridge ponderosas that completely hid their house from the east. The tornado continued eastward directly hitting the Slaby’s completed, but not yet occupied house. The garage was a complete loss and the remainder of the house shifted on its foundation. Doghouses, trash cans, 2×4’s and shake shingles filled the air.

The tornado moved up Corral taking windows, shingles and lawn furniture from several houses before inflicting heavy damage on the Wright’s. It jumped to I25, flipped a truck and a car 50 feet before disappearing upwards leaving only a ferocious hail and electrical storm behind. Less than 15 minutes passed from touchdown to the end of the hail.

Neighbors quickly crawled out of their basements to take stock of the damage. Men grabbed hammers, plastic sheets and ladders and pitched in at several of the heavily damaged houses. News copters soon circled overhead and the insurance agents were on hand with cameras and claim forms.

Blizzard...

Newcomers may have noticed the red gates on southbound I25 at Lincoln Ave. The State Patrol closes the gates when the road conditions make I25 impassable. (Forget trying to talk the officers into letting you go just over the hill to SR!) An early October storm in 1997, again on a Friday, caused the longest shutdown in memory. Probably due to the increase in Castle Rock residents, the patrol delayed longer than usual in closing the gates. Soon it didn't matter, at about 7:30 PM jack-knifed trucks and sideways cars closed I25. A blizzard raged through Saturday. SR neighbors emerged Sunday morning to begin the arduous digging, plowing and snow blowing. Numerous hardy souls pitched in to help. I25 reopened Sunday afternoon and bedraggled travelers finally made it home.

Way Back When Part VIII

from the May 2000 Surrey Sentinel Vol. 7, Issue 1



Gunderson's Arena

We know that SR residents, the Wells, Genschs, Davilas, and Jensens along Clydesdale built the first SR riding arena near the picnic area in the late 1960s. This arena is well maintained to this day.

For years we've wondered about the abandoned arena and corral along frontage road beside this windmill. This riding area was obviously built for action, but hasn't been touched in all our years here – now is in

complete disrepair. This is Gunderson's Arena; SR's second riding arena and cattle chute that was used for little local rodeos, horse shows, and barrel racing for about three years in the mid-70s.

This windmill will now last another generation and several more I25 upgrades. What happens when the light rail stretches to Colorado Springs?

Jim Gunderson built this arena, cattle chute, and working well about 1974. Jim owned the old Littleton Feed Store on Bellview and commuted to SR to ride horses here. He planned to build a house across from the arena on the west side of the road in the beautiful hills. Jim suffered a serious back injury just three years after building this arena. This marked the end of the arena's use and Jim's association with SR.