

Historical Occupation of the Property

This brief overview covers only recent “post-contact” habitation and use, i.e. since 1901 when the first known white settler, Robert Kemp established his occupancy and built the small cabin seen in the Photograph Gallery in this Section.

Of course, the area had a long history of prior habitation by native peoples. Rock carvings (“petroglyphs”) are common in the area along the Columbia River from the modern day site of Hood River and eastward past the modern city of The Dalles. When Lewis and Clark came down the Columbia River in 1804, they made note of the extensive European artifacts and trade goods they found among the native peoples of this area. Some of the oldest known human artifacts, thousands of years old, have been found at Fork Rock about 125 miles south of the property in the High Desert of Central Oregon.

The first permanent settlers in Hood River County filed a donation land claim in 1854; by 1880 there were about 50 residents who were already beginning to plant the orchards that would later make the Hood River valley world-famous. South of the property, settlers who wanted to plant potatoes cleared the tiny town named Fir from the woods. That venture failed, but the winding road to the now-vanished town remains as Fir Mountain Road.

In 1912 Kemp had gone, and a couple named Harry and Mary Sidney owned the property. They built the “Mansion” on the top of the hill at the north end of Parcel 1. The story of this couple is both fascinating and a little spooky. The written records we have collected are contradictory in the basic facts, but it’s obvious the couple had some notoriety in town right from the beginning. The house, described as “pretentious” in the official Hood River County Records, was built in 1911 and stood in various stages of repair and disrepair until it was finally torn down in 2003.

Over the years several families owned the property. Various land –use ventures were tried. Apples were planted, but apparently didn’t do too well. The pastures were used to make hay, there were various logging operations in the woods around the house, various schemes to move water from the wetlands to the house were tried and abandoned.

In the late 1930s, a cistern fed from a spring on the hillsides east of the wetlands was successfully constructed and supplied the house with water. According to some reminiscences we’ve heard from the daughters of the people who made that cistern, they kept pet trout in the cistern.

The Sidneys built the house to look at Mt. Adams, north of the Columbia River. In the decades since, the brush field the house overlooked grew up into a dense stand of Douglas-fir and Ponderosa pine forest, and now the view of Mt. Adams is somewhat obscured from the Sidney’s old porch site.

Over the last nine years, we have attempted to bring some coherence to the land use. The wetlands have been rehabilitated and restored to a fully functioning condition, and the forests have been greatly improved in health and vigor, as well as being made much more immune to the dangers of fire. Extensive discussions of these subjects can be found in the Wetlands and Forestry sections of this web site.