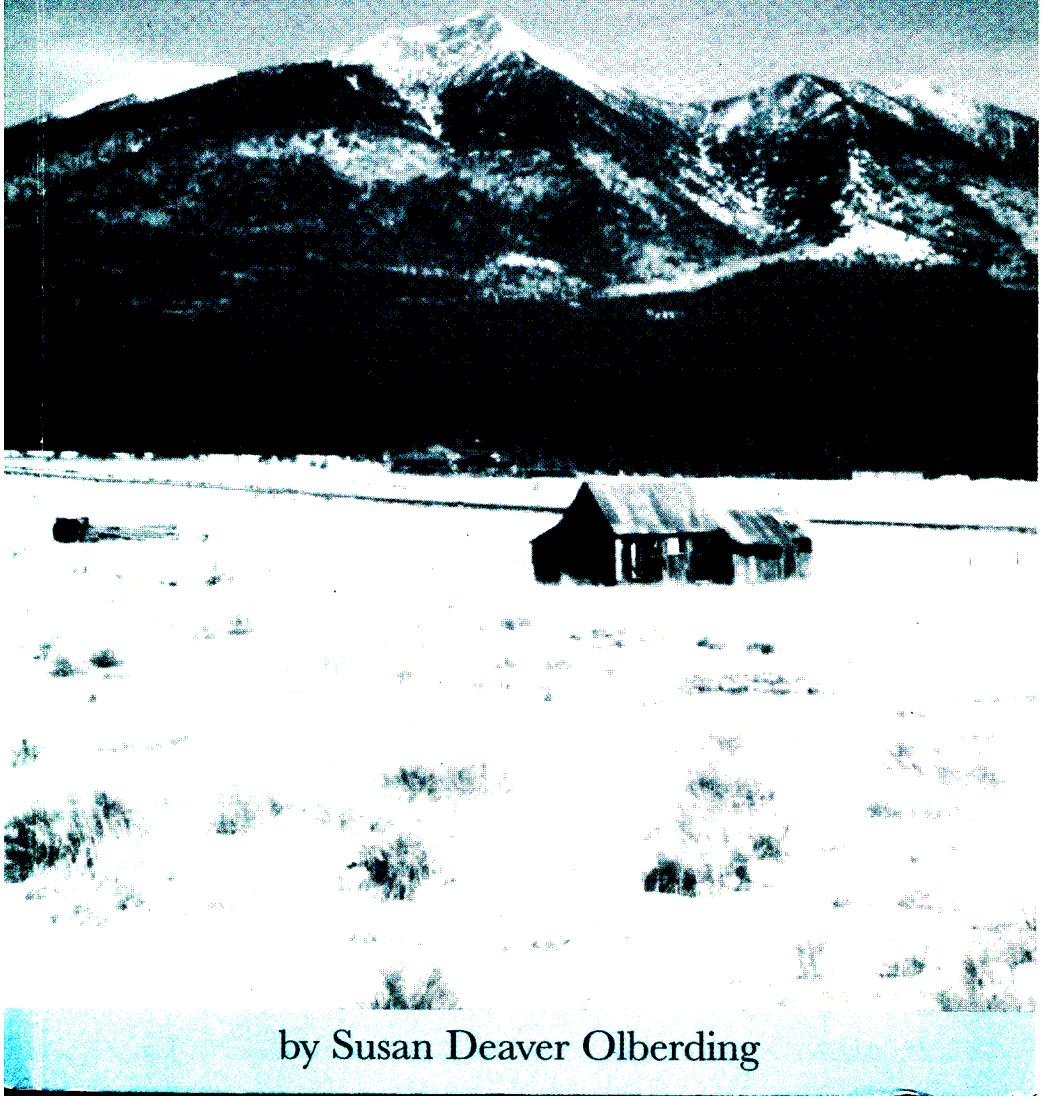
Fort Valley

THEN AND NOW

A LOOK AT AN ARIZONA SETTLEMENT



by Susan Deaver Olberding

Revised edition, 2007.
Published by Fort Valley Publishing,
Flagstaff, Arizona
Printed in the United States of America
Design by Sullivan Santamaria Design

ISBN 978-0-9720048-0-0

Big Leroux is located on a hillside in a cove-like park off the main valley, while the other spring is east of Big Leroux. Big Leroux's output was measured at 14,400 gallons per day in a 1981 engineering report. Before being capped, spring water poured forth so vigorously it created an alley (still visible) between trees on its southward path in the valley to its merger with the Rio de Flag (historically known as the River de Flag). Channels were formed and then improved by homesteaders for irrigation and livestock use.[3]

The two Leroux Springs have been important not only to early expeditions and Fort Valley residents, but also the town of Flagstaff. Water shortages in 1881 spurred two enterprising men, Charles Veit and Frank Cavanaugh, to haul water from the springs to thirsty townspeople in barrels on an oxen-pulled wagon. Wherever they saw a stick with a white rag on it, the men stopped and sold a barrel of water for a dollar.[4]

An 1882 map shows a proposed water pipeline from Big Leroux Springs into town. Col. Thomas S. Sedgewick, land agent for the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad, developed this project. Evidently, the A & P was willing to fund construction to assist in supplying the town and its railroad with always-available water, especially since adequate resources have always been a concern to Flagstaff residents. The planned pipeline roughly followed the wagon road that, at the time, went from Big Leroux southeasterly across today's Highway 180 intersection with Snowbowl Road, then on to follow the Rio de Flag. The idea never materialized.[5]

Unlike Flagstaff, much of Fort Valley had easy access to water—in some places the groundwater is just three feet below the surface—and settlers dug shallow wells for domestic use and irrigation. They would shovel down to fifteen or twenty feet and line the hole with rocks and allow water to seep in. Then a bucket would be dropped into the well to retrieve the water. Fort Valley gets about twenty-three inches of precipitation a year, which easily recharges groundwater aquifers. Greater amounts of moisture, particularly in the spring thaw and in the summer

jumped. Smith adds, "In fact there exists a reign of terror throughout the mountain, Brigham Perkins who has just been up there with freight tells me that he fully believes Heber's life is in great danger there."[7]

Why Young chose Fort Valley is unknown. The area is four miles as the crow flies from the railway at today's Bellemont; other forested areas closer to construction sites would have been more convenient. However, Young may have been looking to build a permanent LDS community, and Fort Valley with its remoteness and dependable water source perhaps appeared suitable. The valley's population temporarily burgeoned, possibly to one hundred people.

Young is responsible for building Fort Moroni in Fort Valley for supposed defense against marauding Apaches, who lived over a hundred miles away in eastern Arizona. He built a stockade about ninety feet square in the middle of Fort Valley and named it Fort Moroni after an angel in the Book of Mormon. Fort Moroni was patterned after stockades built at the LDS settlements near today's Joseph City and Winslow. The sturdy forts were built with local materials in the shape of hollow squares and with high walls, double-thick logs, guardhouses, and loopholes. At these locales, the colonists lived in small houses within the stockade and shared communal dining facilities.

At Fort Valley, colonists built shelters along the tree line and could take refuge inside the stockade if necessary. Fort Moroni's interior consisted of a row of cabins and an open compound for livestock and supplies. Eight-foot-long railroad ties were placed vertically on top of one another for a total length of sixteen feet. Four feet of this was set into the ground, and the remaining twelve feet formed the stockade walls. Parapets were built on the corners to provide sentries with unobstructed views. These guards were organized into two companies and practiced regularly to prepare for possible attacks. The fort was never a battle site—yet one day everyone assumed fighting positions at the sound of approaching hoofbeats, only to find the threat was nothing more than LDS boys with their flock of sheep and burros. The burros were chasing the sheep toward the fort.[8]

Young fulfilled the tie-cutting contract in 1881, after much legal dispute with the railway, and entered the cattle business,

whereby Fort Moroni became the headquarters of the Moroni Cattle Company. Ben Wittick, a March, 1883 visitor, remembered the fort as "a couple of dozen log houses, wood-choppers shanties, commissary, etc." Young was considered a cordial host, and his rooms were filled with fine furnishings, portraits of LDS saints, and the latest newspapers and magazines. Young employed a man to plant a vegetable garden near Big Leroux Springs to utilize the rich soil and abundant water. An inventory list of fort assets from 1884 includes the normal plows, blacksmith supplies, and farm and ranch utensils, along with two bobsleds, a telescope, black walnut furniture, an organ, and a piano.[9]

John W. Young apparently squatted on the Fort Moroni land, for no deed exists before 1883. He did have "possessory right" to 160 acres of land and improvements on "Leroux Springs ranch" with $30.00 in taxes due March 1, 1882. On July 25, 1883, he sold it and additional lands to Arizona Cattle and Wool Company for one dollar and two thousand shares of capital stock. This deed, which includes information on the Boston Party location, reads in part:

> All the buildings and improv(e)ments known as "Fort Moroni" situated in said County and about eight miles in a northwesterly direction from Flagstaff station on the A & P Railroad, together with the well and two small seapes or springs near Leroux Springs, also Leroux Springs about two miles north of said Fort. Also a seape or well about one thousand yards in a westerly direction from said fort; also seape at "Boston Place" west of said fort; also seape about one mile west of said last mentioned "Boston Place..."[10]

Young's transaction with the Arizona Cattle and Wool Company must have been kept secret, as it was six months later when the *Arizona Champion* of January 12, 1884 announced:

> It is reported that a wealthy English company has secured the spring and stock range of John W. Young, seven miles north of here. This is one of the very best ranges in the country, upon which is located Fort Maroni (sic). The fort,

In 1906, the U.S. Forest Service opened some of its land for homesteading as agricultural properties, including Fort Valley acreage, so as to put the soil to its highest economic use. However, most of the Fort Valley homesteaders under this program used their territory for timber or grazing rights. Follow-up forms on Coconino National Forest homesteaders have a section titled "Reason for not Occupying," with choices being 1) soil, water, or climatic reason; 2) lack of markets for products; 3) greater economic and social opportunities elsewhere; and 4) lack of grazing privileges. For Fort Valley homesteaders, any of the choices could have been applicable. Forest Service forms on file often mention structures and improvements; in 1921, for example, an inventory of a 140-acre parcel in the southwest corner of Section 26 lists one hundred cultivated acres and a forty-acre pasture, two frame houses, a frame barn, two and a half miles of fence, corrals, grain rooms, garage, cellar, temporary well, and a surface stock tank. The site today features newer structures and the tank has been enlarged.[4]

Lands upon which Little Leroux and Big Leroux Springs are located are more valuable, of course, especially to livestock operators. LDS squatters' claims on the water transferred to the ACC, but as far as the government was concerned, the lands were still open to homesteading. Homesteader Norman Hall claimed land in the southeast quarter of Section 14, through which a stream ran from Big Leroux Springs, even though the spring itself is on the northeast quarter of the same section. About this time (1890s), the Arizona Cattle Company (ACC) was constructing pipelines from Big Leroux. Joint use of the spring by Hall and the ACC continued for a short while, but in fall 1891, John V. Rhodes of the ACC petitioned the Coconino County Board of Supervisors, requesting permission to build a private road through Hall's land for ACC's access to Big Leroux. At the next Board of Supervisors meeting, Hall filed a petition asking that a public highway be established on the eastern side of his land, which would allow access for everyone, not just the ACC. The board ruled the Rhodes petition as unconstitutional, as the proposed road would be on private land, and declared the entire incident null and void.

Neither road was built. Hall moved to Phoenix in December 1891 and sold his land to the Riordan Mercantile Company. Rhodes, meanwhile, applied unsuccessfully again in October 1892 for a road.[5]

Big Leroux may also have been the homestead site for a family named Adams, according to George Hochderffer's 1965 book. He says this family consisted of a minister father, a mother, and seven daughters who all took up claims and built a church near Leroux Springs. From his description, it would be Big Leroux. He listed no dates, and no proof of a homestead patent has been found. However, a deed of January 5, 1886, says that Samuel C. Church sold the northeast quarter of Section 14 to Ben B. Bullwinkle and the Arizona Cattle Company. The sale included all buildings, water troughs, fences, and corrals.[6]

In June 1902, Al Beasley filed to appropriate all surplus and flood waters—in fact, all the waters—issuing from Little Leroux Springs. He intended to build and maintain a dam and reservoir for watering livestock, for sale to consumers, and for domestic, mining, and mechanical irrigation. Legal action was filed against Beasley because of this venture, and he abandoned the idea. He may have also constructed a water tower near his cabin, which was close to the Rio de Flag off of what is now South Snowbowl Road. A wagon loaded with empty barrels was backed into the tower; once the barrels were filled with water, they were hauled to town and sold.[7]

FARMING

Homesteaders during the early twentieth century plowed under the remaining native grasses and planted crops. Fort Valley crop production is limited because of a short growing season that has, at best, only a thirty-day frost-free period. But such discouraging figures did not deter homesteaders from planting, especially root crops, which are not so severely subject to temperature fluctuations and high winds. Potatoes, for example, were grown successfully in the valley for several decades. On a ridge in Section 25 are the remains of a partial dug-out wooden structure that may be a pota-

to cellar from the 1890s. It borders a small, open park of about five acres. (Parks, or treeless areas, were more common then; the ponderosa pines have grown much since.)

On September 1, 1917, the U.S. government opened the Agricultural Experiment Station for Coconino County in Flagstaff, and appointed an agricultural agent to assist farmers. The agent's first annual report lists the county's leading crop as potatoes, with spring wheat, oats, barley, corn, and pinto beans also grown. Local businesses bought ninety-eight percent of the potatoes, and enough wheat was grown to supply the Flagstaff Milling Company. Overall, though, farming was a limited economic force in the county, far outpaced by lumbering and the livestock industry.[8]

By 1925, agricultural agent records mention that Fort Valley's prairie dog population received a dose of thallium poison, and rodent control remained an ongoing activity. Lettuce being grown experimentally in Fort Valley failed because of drought. Dry weather affected livestock operators and farmers during most of the 1920s, until the extremely wet year of 1929 brought thirteen inches of rain to Fort Valley and signaled the end of the drought.

Fort Valley farmer Charles Corey and his family built a large barn, grew oats, and raised hogs. After a few years, they moved closer to Flagstaff for access to schools and to avoid the harsh winters. They kept the land until 1950, evidently continuing to farm it, as extension agent records show they grew oats and potatoes in 1945, and Corey used poison to control the grasshoppers.

Farmers Rufus B. Rountree, his brother H.G., and their families moved into Fort Valley in 1930. Rufus owned part of the land between Big Leroux Springs and the treeline in Section 23. At the time of purchase, his farm included a well, a frame house, hay barn, garage, cellar, and storeroom. The farm lands were infested with bindweed and ragweed, and Rountree sought counsel from the agricultural agent to eradicate the problem. He productively farmed his land and was closely involved with the county agricultural agent and the Farm Bureau for many years. He was among the lobbyists who worked to keep the Agricultural Extension Office in Coconino County in 1931. He served on the executive

committee of the Farm Bureau between 1932 and 1938. Rountree's farm became an example for other county farmers because of weed spraying, terracing of sixty-five acres to halt wind and water erosion, and crop rotating to strengthen the soil. Rountree grew potatoes, oats, alfalfa, peas, and wheat. Eight acres produced five hundred pounds of potatoes with proper preparation and legume rotation. Rountree grew hay for his own use and stored it and other crops in a trench silo that resembled a dug-out with no top. Rufus's brother H.G. owned and farmed land on Section 26. He also farmed successfully for two decades.[9]

Fort Valley occupants supported World War II programs by participating in food production and preservation, nutrition education, and other activities. Resident Ida Tillman led a valley mattress- and comforter-making project organized by the Home Extension Service. Ten families made twenty mattresses and comforters that were either sold or used by the families.

The 1941–42 agricultural agent's plans for Fort Valley included better seed potato preparation, which would result in increased yields; land terracing to control erosion; chemical control to discourage weeds and rodents; and establishment of small grains and increased chicken and egg production to diversify the farmers' market. Among Fort Valley farmers listed in the agricultural agent's annual reports of 1942 and 1943 were R.B. Rountree, Dr. Charles Sechrist (who also had terraced his land and was growing sweet clover), and Bert Babbitt. In the 1947–48 report, the agricultural agent reported only forty acres of potatoes grown in the county, compared to eight hundred acres six years prior. The next year saw only twenty-five county acres planted to potatoes. The peak years of farming in Coconino County had passed. Fort Valley farmers had wearied of the unending work, and began subdividing and selling their crop lands during the 1950s.[10]

FORT VALLEY EXPERIMENTAL FOREST STATION

Gus Pearson's description of his initial visit to Fort Valley in August 1908, which opens this chapter, led to the establishment of the nation's first U.S. Forest Service facility dedicated to forest