

Jackson Ranch and Gardiner/Orr Ranch
Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge – Northwest Montana

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The Gardiner/Orr and Jackson Ranches are significant at the local level for their associations with the homesteaders and early residents of Pleasant Valley; associations with local ranching history; and association with the Great Northern Railway. The ranches have both been officially determined eligible to the National Register of Historic Places, with concurrence by the Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). However they have not been formally nominated to the National Register. The following historical information is excerpted from *Where the Green Grass Grows* by Jean Jackson Wakefield.

Early Homesteaders (1887 – 1890)

The earliest homesteaders arrived in the Valley prior to 1890. They were Charles and Neptune Lynch, Jack Nowlan, and William Orr and Frank Gardiner. They each homesteaded 160 acres, ran cattle, built log cabins and made other improvements on the land. Jack Nowlan built a 2-story log house, 2 low log cabins and several smaller structures. Although most of the early settlers arrived around 1887 or 1888, many of the homestead claims were not formally filed until after 1900 when the new County Courthouse was built in Kalispell. Previously, files had to be claimed in Missoula, which was a long arduous journey on horseback.

Jack Nowlan was the second settler in Pleasant Valley, after Charlie and Nep Lynch. Jack worked as a cattle foreman for the Lynch brothers in Wild Horse Plains and then homesteaded in Pleasant Valley in 1888. He built his homestead cabin near a creek, a low log cabin with a couple of side windows and a short door that one had to stoop to get through. Later he built a 2-story square hewn log house which was still in use when he sold the property to the Jacksons in 1910. Nowlan purchased an additional 160 acres, and it is in that area that the Jacksons later built their buildings. Nowlan's 2-story house burned down over the winter of 1916 – 1917.

The Great Northern Railway (1892 – 1904)

The Great Northern Railway sent Charles Frederick Beals Haskell to find a line down from the summit of the Rockies to Washington. Haskell's efforts are recorded in the publication "On Reconnaissance for the Great Northern: Letters of Charles Frederick Beals Haskell 1889 –1891." Haskell wrote of his charge, "It is the grandest expedition I ever undertook. The consummation of all my boyish dreams."

As a result of his reconnaissance, the Great Northern chose to build its line through Pleasant Valley. When word got out that the railroad would build its main line through the valley, the valley saw an influx of single men looking for employment or hoping to locate a homestead near the rail line. The railroad contracted sections of the line in flat areas to individuals who had horses, scrapers and brawn.

In 1891 Jack Nowlan granted the railroad a right-of-way to build a spur across his meadow to haul out gravel from a nearby pit. The entrepreneurial Nowlan set up a saloon on his property to quench the thirst of construction crews. He later moved the saloon ¼ mile west.

During construction, there was a construction camp at the gravel pit with a small group of buildings, cabins and rock ovens. By 1903 one of the cabins had become Pleasant Valley's first schoolhouse. A sawmill was built in the 1890s, further west at Lakeview.

The section over Haskell Pass was too steep and difficult for unskilled labor, and the railroad built that section itself using skilled Oriental crews. Sources differ on whether the men were of Japanese or Chinese descent. Two large trestles were constructed on the east side of the pass. Some evidence of these still exists. The larger trestle was over 150 feet high, over 300 feet long and built on a curve. The route over the pass also included a 1415-foot tunnel. These trestles, fill, culverts and tunnel were among the Great Northern's more ambitious projects while building this grade. West of the pass, the railroad grade wound down, in some places reaching grades in excess of 1.5%. It was these steep grades that eventually doomed this section of the railroad.

The first trains came through the valley in 1892. By 1893 the railway completed the Cascade Tunnel at Scenic, Washington, concluding construction of the northernmost line from Minneapolis to Seattle on their "transcontinental" railroad. Two passenger trains each day, one each way, ran through the valley, and there was daily freight service. The route included a tunnel and trestles at Haskell Pass.

The Pleasant Valley Section House and siding were just east of where the Jackson family would later locate their buildings. The location was selected because it contained springs and a good source of water. While the trains ran, the section house consisted of a tarpaper covered house, a depot shack, water tank and siding. The Great Northern constructed a timber flume on the Jack Nowlan place to divert water.

The route was not without its problems, however. By 1904, the Montana & Great Northern Railway (a subsidiary of the parent line) completed an alternate line that passed through Whitefish instead of Kalispell. The alternate route had longer mileage but easier grades and fewer curves. In October 1904 all trains ceased operation through Pleasant Valley. The residents of Pleasant Valley and nearby Lost Prairie had depended heavily upon the railroad for mail and supplies. It was a big blow to the area when the operations ceased.

Tracks and ties were left on or next to the Pleasant Valley grade for years. Over the years ranchers recycled the ties for various uses. When the grade became a road, the spikes lived on to plague drivers for over a hundred years.

Gardiner and Orr

Frank Gardiner and William Orr first met near Leadville, Colorado. They became partners in a freight packing operation with pack string teams of burros. Later they switched to mules and horses. Business led them to Montana, and they arrived in Pleasant Valley in 1888.

William Orr homesteaded 160 acres where the Orr buildings still stand. Frank Gardiner homesteaded on land adjoining William on the east, and south of Jack Nowlan's claim. All three of the claims were primarily used to run cattle. Gardiner and Orr contracted with the Great Northern to carry survey crews and equipment during the preliminary 1890 survey.

In 1892 Pleasant Valley established its first post office with William Orr as postmaster. This was abolished but later re-established in 1918 with Frank Gardiner serving as postmaster of the Pleasant Valley Post Office at the Gardiner Orr ranch. A portion of the front porch of the house served as the post office. Mrs. Orr provided room and board for travelers at the same time. The post office closed in 1933 when the Orrs moved out of the valley. At that time the post office was moved to the former Lynch Ranch.

In 1896, Mr. Orr told his neighbor Charlie Cross that he was going to make a trip to Sandpoint, Idaho to get a cow and a calf. Charlie couldn't figure out why Bill would go so far just for a cow and a calf. Mr. Orr returned with his new bride, Esther, and her five-year-old son from a previous marriage! The Orrs had seven more children and Esther lived to the age of 97.

In 1933, William and Esther Orr and Frank Gardiner left Pleasant Valley. The ranches were lost to the Federal Land Bank, but the Orr's son Bill and his wife Peg stayed on as managers of the Gardiner and Orr properties until 1937.

The ranch had a few short-term managers who ran cattle, but it mostly stood empty until Art and Velma Lund bought it from the Federal Land Bank in 1941. The Lunds ran cattle on the ranch and Velma taught in the Lost Prairie School.

When the Lunds bought the ranch, the house needed a lot of work since it had been empty for so long. The Lunds lived in the original Orr homestead cabin for the first six years while they remodeled the frame house. It is not known what this remodeling effort entailed. Art and Velma lived in the house with their three foster children, Margaret, George and Robert Flaschmeyer. They adopted George. The Lunds sold the ranch in 1970.

The Jackson Family

Ed Jackson purchased the Nowlan property in 1910. Ed was from Marquette, Wyoming and needed land because his ranch near Cody WY had been purchased to build the Shoshone Dam (later renamed Buffalo Bill Dam). Ed, his wife Kate and their children Caleb, Ken, Sam, Margaret, Virgil, Ellen and Leonard built the main house in 1917. Ed died later the same year. Kate remained in the house for 50 years until 1960. Virgil, Ken and Elizabeth lived there until they sold it in 1969.

Kate was only 45 years old when she was widowed with six children. Sam, the oldest boy still living at home, assumed the role of helping to run the ranch. Kate churned and sold butter, chickens and eggs, and ran beef cattle. In 1920, Sam left the ranch. The youngest son, Leonard, left in 1927. Kate and her sons Virgil, Kenneth and Kenneth's wife Elizabeth ran the ranch for the remainder of their working lives.

The Great Depression

The Great Depression began to hit Montana in the early 1920s. Many of the ranches in Pleasant Valley were lost during the 1920s and 1930s. The Gardiner and Orr ranch was lost to the Federal Land Bank in 1933. The Jackson Ranch was the only ranch in Pleasant Valley to survive, and they were barely able to do so. They were milking 40 head of Milking Shorthorns with three milking machines and selling butter fat. The cream was the only way the Jackson Ranch kept going.

The banks of Montana and the Federal Land Bank in Spokane held the mortgages on many Montana ranches. When the ranchers were unable to pay the mortgages, the banks found themselves owning ranches they were unable to run. They sold them as quickly as possible at bargain prices, but the process usually took several years.

Most of the ranchers in Pleasant Valley tried to hold on during the Great Depression by diversifying their businesses. Cattle prices were not enough to keep food on the table, so they added sheep, chickens, pigs and cultivated large gardens to supply most of their own food.

Pleasant Valley 1971 – Present

Since 1971, Pleasant Valley has lost most of its year-round residents. Following a pattern of ranching ownership typical throughout much of Montana and Wyoming, ranches have been combined into larger ranches and sold to out-of-state buyers who do not actually live there. Family ranches were not always able to be kept in the family as land prices rose and cattle prices fell.

An absentee owner from California purchased the Jackson and Gardiner-Orr Ranches, along with two other ranches: the Jake Olson Ranch and the former Doll Ranch, which had been renamed Lost Trail Ranch. This owner kept the property for six years and then sold it to Montana Power Company (MPC). MPC bought the property to restore wetlands around Medicine Lake in mitigation for wetlands that were lost when the company built Kerr Dam at Flathead Lake.

In 1999, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) purchased part of the Lost Trail Ranch (including the historic Jackson and Gardiner/Orr Ranches). The Montana State Department of Natural Resources and Conservation purchased the remainder of the Lost Trail Ranch. The USFWS established the 7,885-acre Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge for the benefit of migratory birds and resident wildlife species. The Refuge is open to the public for hunting, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education.

The Main Houses of both historic ranches are currently occupied by Refuge employees and their families. No changes in use are planned.

Architectural Style and Character-Defining Features

The style of the Main Houses can be characterized as Folk Houses, National: Pyramidal Family, using the architectural categories in *A Field Guide to American Houses* by Virginia and Lee McAlester. The McAlesters identify key features of this style as a nearly square plan, pyramidal or nearly pyramidal hip roof, 2-story, and a full-width front porch with hipped roof. Many of these were built with stylistic detailing, but many remained simple folk forms lacking such fashionable detail. The McAlester book notes that most of these houses were built between 1850 and 1890, which was earlier than the Jackson and Gardiner/Orr main houses.

Another publication describes a style/form that also fits the ranch houses. The Colorado Historical Society's Guide to Colorado's Historic Architecture and Engineering describes the Foursquare form, which also matches these houses very well. The Foursquare form is residential, two stories, square in plan, with an unadorned exterior, hipped roof, full-width porch with hipped roof on square posts, and general overall simplicity. They were built during the first three decades of the 20th century. Other characteristics of the Foursquare form that are not found on the Jackson and Gardiner/Orr houses are a central dormer, brackets and modillions, and a classical frieze with dentils. While this form is identified in a Colorado publication, Montana does not have such a publication, and the description seems to fit well.

The Jackson Ranch Garage is of Pioneer Log style, characterized by round logs, corner notched, with chinking and daubing. They were usually one story and usually gable roofed. They were predominant near mountain locations from 1858 to the 1930s. The Garage fits this description, although its roof has been replaced to a simple shed.