

# When Columbus settled Bear Flat

By Stan Brown

## Tonto Creek Adventures, Chapter 7

Downstream from the mouth of Christopher Creek we come to the last homestead before Tonto Creek flows through a large wilderness area on its way to the Tonto Basin. The homestead is known as Bear Flat, and its settlement brings to mind the life style of the area's pioneer families. Looking in on the life of one of them we capture the flavor of pioneers under the Rim.

Bear Flat was settled by Columbus Buford Haught, the son of Henry and Sarah Bell Haught. He was born Sept. 26, 1895, during his parent's westward odyssey, and arrived in the Rim Country with them in 1897 at the age of two. How did he come by such a name as "Columbus?"



One must look back to Pennsylvania where the Haught clan originated in America, having immigrated there with William Penn from Europe. Members of the family began to spread out along the western frontier, and genealogy records show that in Illinois one couple who had been born in Pennsylvania had a son they named Christopher Columbus Haught. Since the forbears of the Arizona Haughts also lived in Illinois before moving on to Texas, and thence to Arizona, it seems that the name "Columbus Haught" had been on the family tree for some time.

Henry and Sarah Bell Haught's son was hardly ever called Columbus because it was too hard a word for the younger children. They called him "the little boy" and over the years

that shortened simply to "Boy." As Boy Haught was growing up to be a cowboy school took a back seat when roundups and other ranch work summoned. He attended here and there, from time to time, along with his numerous cousins who lived up and down these same valleys.

Boy Haught served in the army during World War I, but before leaving for the war he purchased the squatter's rights to a claim owned by Ed Harris along Tonto Creek. It was called Bear Flats because prolific berry bushes along the creek made it a haven for bears. During the conflict in Europe Boy's frontier ability to shoot straight placed him as a sharp shooter in the front lines, and he was in Germany when the Armistice was signed.

Discharged May 23, 1919, he returned from the war to continue developing his land. Years later in an interview with a local educator, Ira Murphy, Boy Haught expressed pride that the family owned all the land from Little Green Valley to Tonto Creek, Thompson Draw (where the Haughts operated a saw mill), Bear Flats, and up stream to "Old Dick Williams place," the place that Henry and Boy's brother Sam had settled. "We owned all that at one time."

His statement did not include Kohl's Ranch, which was never owned by the Haughts, but it speaks of how the settlers were so isolated they just took possession of the entire forest and treated it as their own.

There was little time for social life, except when the dances took place at the schools on Tonto Creek and in Gordon Canyon. It was at a dance in the Gordon Canyon schoolhouse that Boy Haught met Flora Hunt. After that first meeting he would ride over to Gordon Canyon, where she lived with her uncle and mother at the Anderton place, and escort her to the dances. Since the dance usually lasted all night, he would escort her home the next day and then ride home to go to work. [1]

Flora and Boy Haught were married Dec. 25, 1922 at the Little Green Valley Ranch. Flora said that it was too far to ask their friends and family to come all the way to her home in Gordon Canyon, so she consented to have the wedding at the Haught place. The couple made their home at Bear Flat in the little house that already stood on the property. "It was fine for us," Flora later said. "Our first child, Columbus Junior, was born there."



Their ranch was just 2 miles east of the Henry Haught homestead in Little Green Valley. The two ranches today are still connected by Tonto Forest Road 405, and in imagination one can "return to yesteryear" while driving or hiking this historic trail. Because of his previous work on the property, the required five years for improving a homestead claim were fulfilled during their first year of marriage, and Columbus Boy Haught was able to "prove up" on it. He received a formal patent to the homestead in 1923. Boy and his brother Sam then built a new house on the Flat for his growing family, where his three other children were born.