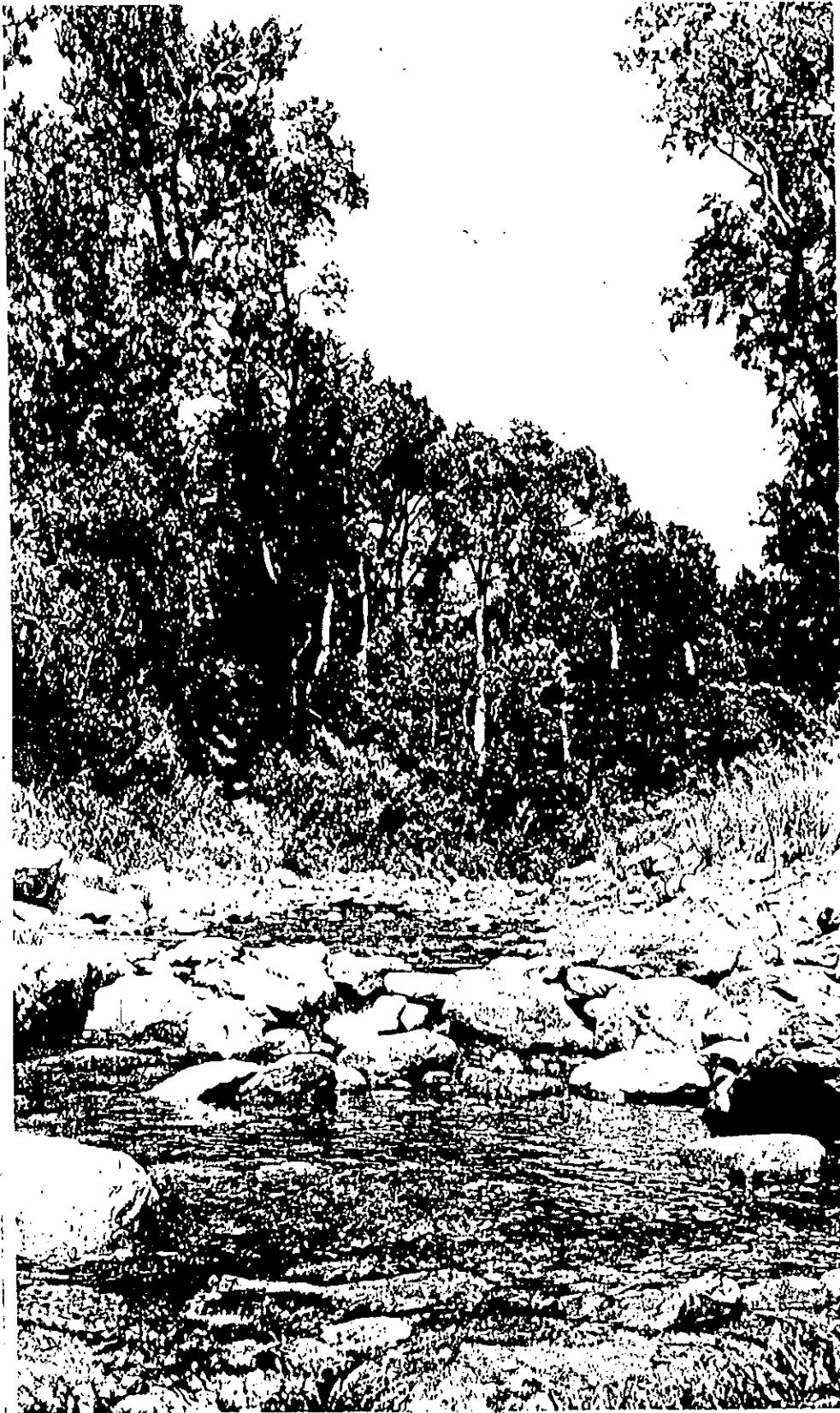


CHRISTOPHER CREEK

IN ARIZONA'S HIGH COUNTRY

by Clayann Ashby Cook



How this scene must have looked to Ol' Isadore Christopher when he first saw the tall pines, the green grazing grasses and the clear water running over rocks in this fresh untouched land.

Christopher was in the employ of the U.S. Cavalry as an Indian Scout, with his home being Fort McDowell.

Ol' Isadore surely lived up to the nomenclature of "Mountain Man" as he provided horses, fresh game meat, and raised hogs for the soldiers back at Fort McDowell. The Apaches, which in the 1880's were still uncontained on a Reservation, raided his homesite on a regular basis, twice burning down his cabins only to have him tenaciously rebuild.

His cabins were built of hand hewn logs, and an adobe mixture of clay, grass and hogs hair provided the chinking. The interior of the cabins were as rough as the exterior, but as primitive as they may seem they still serve as a beloved home today, 100 years later.

Isadore Christopher, as his name gives away, was a Scotchman by ancestry and in later years his frugality and keen eye for proper finance gave way to many stories long to be remembered.

One such tale, believed to be factual, began when a fellow homesteader heard of Christopher's purported wealth and his practice of lending to those who were in need. He came upon

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Christopher on the trail one day and told the story of his financial plight. He also told Isadore that he didn't mind paying the high interest rates (15 to 18%) because of his desperate need. They arranged a meeting later in the week at an appointed time. The Homesteader was late in arrival and the quote "If you're a late coming to get it. . . You'll be a late paying' it back!" came to be. The Scotchman, in all his wisdom, refused the loan.

Ol' Isadore was not to remain a bachelor forever, as his long time friend, John Bowman, told him of Mail Order Brides. Isadore sent away for two before one would stay and become Mrs. Christopher.

When Mrs. Christopher died (buried in Payson) Ol' Isadore sold his original 160 acre ranch to John Bowman and left for 20 river Country in Northern California, never to be heard of again. The date of this transaction is not remembered.

John Bowman's son Louis had homesteaded the "13" Ranch higher on the mountain. Later when Louis' wife died leaving two small children, John Bowman sold the CI Ranch and moved up the mountain to aid in the raising of the children, Bill and Kathryn.

The year was 1938 when Paul Revere and Polly Rodema Ashby purchased the CI Ranch to be used as summer retreat and future retirement home.

Paul was a plaster contractor in Phoenix and when WW II was in it's highest momentum he found it almost impossible to run a business as the Government was drafting his men as soon as he could train them.

For the ten years following 1938 the family spent the summers repairing and making additions to the original log structure, known as a Dog Trot House. In the beginning there was a one story cabin with a driveway between another two story cabin. This driveway was later enclosed and used as an entry way and hall between the kitchen and living room. A second story was then added over the kitchen as another bedroom. The upstairs housed 5 double beds in what was only two bedrooms.

The Ashby's remained on the Ranch all of 1949 and 50. Mrs. Ashby had to teach the two youngest children, Lee and Christine, with school supplies sent from Globe by Jess Hayes the County School Superintendent.

Even though by 1950 most of

Arizona was well modernized, this remote Mogollon Ridge area was still using outside plumbing, woodstoves for cooking and heating, and kerosene lamps for all lighting.

The Ashby's with most of their family now grown and many friends wanting to come to the high country to find the same relief from Phoenix heat, gave thought to building rental cabins. Mr. Ashby decided this was very impractical as the old Bush Highway made the trip from Phoenix to Christopher Creek an 8 hour drive. They then decided to subdivide and sell lots to let family and friends build their own Summer homes.

In 1955 they built the Christopher Creek General Store and Bar and in 1958 they added the Christopher Creek Water Company. Now with the Water Company in use they began to subdivide the original homestead of 160 acres. The old Bush Highway soon gave way to the faster BeeLine and many more people were willing to spend 2 hours on the road to get to their mountain hide-away.

In the late 50's a new kitchen and dining room was added on the cabins. The dining room has wrap around windows so you could see the beautiful colors in the mountain behind the ranch. There was always an abundance of wildlife to be seen on those early mornings. The deer and the elk, the wild turkeys, and even a large variety of squirrels could be observed as the seasons and their colors forever changed.

By 1960 an addition was needed on the Christopher Creek Store and Bar to house all the people who were now spending every free weekend in this "Shangri-la".

In the past 20-plus years the significant growth in the Christopher Creek area can be directly attributed to the Ashby's. With their insight and compassion to share with those who wanted relief from the Valley's severe heat. Christopher Creek today has become a self-sufficient community with a long needed Fire Department being dedicated to Paul R. and Lynn Ashby in June of 1982.

Of the original 160 acre homestead only 27 acres still belong to members the Ashby Family. The remaining land belongs to people from all four corners of Arizona.

