

BACK WHEN | STAN BROWN

RIM COUNTRY PLACES

**CHAPTER 44:
WOODS CANYON**

Woods Canyon is known today for its tranquil 55-acre lake, set among the pines; a very popular spot for camping, fishing and day-trips. It is located just north of S.R. 260 at the top of the Rim, opposite the Fulton Point lookout.

An earthen dam impounds the headwaters of Chevelon Creek to form Woods Canyon Lake, but before there

was a lake there was a lovely valley filled with lush grass, an ideal place for someone to homestead in the 1870s. The homesteader to seize upon this site was John Xavier Woods, born in French-speaking Canada in 1845.

At the age of 20 he came to the United States, landing a job in New Mexico on the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad as an engineer. When the Atlantic and Pacific became the Santa Fe Railroad in 1890, Woods, known by then to be a top-notch engineer, was chosen to operate the first of the "high speed" trains on the new line.

He met and fell in love with Emma Anderson, whose family had come from Sweden and they were married in 1888. Their daughter Selma was born the next year. After a five-year interval another daughter, Paulina, was born in 1894 and in 1896 a son was born and named for his paternal grandfather Frances X. Woods.

During his earlier years on the railroad in Holbrook and Flagstaff, "Jack" Woods learned about the great opportunity for ranching south of there in the Mogollon Rim country. He staked

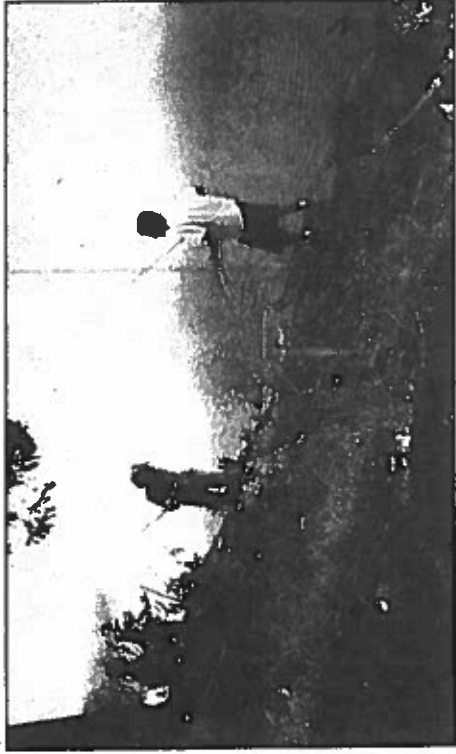
a homestead claim on the headwaters of Chevelon Creek and began to accumulate a large flock of merino sheep.

This breed originated in Spain and was refined in Australia, so perhaps Woods had known the value of their fine wool while growing up in Canada (with its Australian connections).

Eventually Woods was known to run from 6,000 to 10,000 sheep on the open range. In the autumn of 1886 he was one of a number of sheep ranchers who met in Flagstaff to organize the Arizona Sheep Breeders and Wool Growers Association, an organization that is active to this day.

Woods had become prominent in the Territory, and was a member of the Territorial Board of Equalization, an agency that examined county tax assessments and moved to equalize them between the counties. They also heard appeals from property owners. What follows may have resulted from Woods making decisions about property taxes that gained the ire of some property owners, or perhaps it was the fact he ran so many sheep impinging on ranges claimed by cattle ranchers. In the summer of 1888 one of Woods' employees, Al Fulton, was murdered while driving a herd down to the Rim for winter pasture. This happened at the infamous Pleasant Valley War was breaking out, in which sheep men and cattlemen squared off against each other over the use of the range and accusations of stolen horses and cattle.

Al Fulton was brother to the president of the Wool Growers



Association, Harry Fulton. His sheep had crossed the range of cattle rancher Wilford Scarlet, and Scarlet's cowboys chased Fulton and his sheep toward the Rim. Not far inland from the edge of the Rim is a very large, elongated sinkhole, and Fulton was heading his sheep away from the depression when the cowboys caught up with him. They shot him in the back of the head. [1]

The following notice was published in Flagstaff's newspaper *The Champion* on Aug. 10, 1889, page 3, column 3. "FOUND DEAD. F.B. Parker, who recently arrived in town, gives us the following information. The body of Al Fulton, who was in the employ of engineer J. X. Woods as a sheep-

herder, was found by himself and Juan Padia recently on the head of Chevelon Creek in Apache County. He also states that a wound in the back of the head indicated he had been violently dealt with. Mr. Parker says it is his opinion that Babe Shaw was the man who done the deed, as previous to that he threatened the life and used abusive language toward the deceased. They found

considerable money on his body in small silver coins. The murdered man, it is said, has relatives in the Black Hills, Wyoming Territory." The men who found the body buried it near the edge of the Rim, a place that has since been named Fulton Point.

That grave was desecrated so the forest Service removed the remains and reburied them east of today's visitor center, along the old Crook Trail. A concrete slab was poured in the ground over the casket, and the original grave marker was set up. It read, "Al Fulton Murdered 1888."

In 1992 grave robbers attempted to dig up Fulton's remains, but upon hitting the concrete they gave up. The Forest Service had volunteers restore the grave and prepare a new headstone. The new marker reads, "Al Fulton Shot 1901."

It is speculated that either the volunteers did not know their history or this was an attempt to remove Fulton's murder from the era of the Pleasant Valley War.

It was columnist and historian Hal Gaustad who was shocked to

see the new date on the gravestone and produced a photo he had taken of the original marker in 1945.

Woods Canyon made the news in September 1993 when there were two sightings of a Big-Foot by persons hiking near the campground.

"I looked up and that's when I saw it," reported Charlene Fairheart. "It was very large, human in appearance with extremely long hair of a burnt-orange color that fell well below the waist. The men searched the area and found footprints and pods of chewed, bark-like type of food. Tracks were described as 19 and 22 inches long, and 8 inches wide, human like in shape..."

"Jack" Woods retired from his job with the railroad in 1898 and devoted full time to his sheep ranch in what had come to be called Woods Canyon. He died there in May of 1910 as the age of 65.

Chevelon Creek was dammed in 1956, creating one of the most popular recreational lakes in the Rim Country.

SOURCES

U. S. Forest Service; newspapers *The Arizona Champion*, *The Payson Roundup*; Will C. Barnes, *Arizona Place Names*; U.S. Census; oral histories taken by author with Forest Rangers Breezen Jerome and Tim Grier, *The Arizona Historical Review*, July 1986, *The History of Sheep Industry in Arizona* by Bert Haskett.

[1] An alternative story has it that Fulton fell off his horse and was killed under the stampeding flock. This version was undoubtedly circulated by the cattlemen to avoid accusations of murder.