

BACK WHEN | STAN BROWN

CHARACTERS BELOW THE RIM

CHAPTER 12: THE DREW FAMILY ON SHARP CREEK

Some of the Rim Country characters were ephemeral – that is, they were here only a short time, almost lost between the pages of local history. However their lives intertwined with other pioneer families while they were here, and notice needs to be made of the contribution they made to the settlement of the Rim Country. This is the story of two of those “short-term” families.



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The sign on a stretch of the old highway 260 east of Christopher Creek is so small we would hardly notice it, except that the road dips where it crosses an old stone bridge. The sign indicates this is Sharp Creek, a short stream that quickly enters Hunter Creek, which in turn flows into Tonto Creek. The 24-foot bridge was built by the CCC working out of their Indian Gardens camp in 1934, and then reconstructed in 1959 when the old gravel road was converted to pavement. Because of this later alteration the bridge is not eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

It was in 1896 that two brothers put down their unregistered claim on the upper part of this creek. Samuel Sharp was 28 and his brother George Y. Sharp was 22. They left their names in the Great Register of Gila County in 1896; Samuel also registered in 1898 and 1900. Their parents had moved westward from Indiana, as indicated by the birthplaces of their children in Iowa, Kansas and

New Mexico. Shortly after they arrived in the Rim Country their father, Herbert Alonzo Sharp, died. It was October 12, 1897, and he left Samuel and George to care for their mother Sarah Sharp, two younger brothers, John and Jesse, and a sister Mary. She was almost as old as Samuel and would marry Daniel E. Mahoney. Mary and Daniel moved back east, but later census figures indicate she may have been widowed and moved back with her mother on the Arizona ranch.

On Aug. 24, 1900 George Y. Sharp married Elizabeth L. Cox of Holbrook, and after a few years on the Rim Country homestead they moved to her hometown. The Sharp ranch could not support the family, so Samuel and his younger brothers worked as ranch hands around the area. The late Glenn “Slim” Ellison in his book “More Tales From Slim Ellison” makes reference to Sam Sharp as a cowhand from the OW Ranch, over on Canyon Creek. [1] Also an oral history taken by Ira Murphy with Columbus “Boy” Haught (undated) makes reference the Sharp ranch. Speaking of the location of a former Boy Scout Camp, Haught said, “Go right straight up Sharp Creek, the one that heads up to the old Sharp place...”

In 1902 the mother, Sarah, was married to John M. Murray, and they moved to Snowflake where she died in 1927. Thus the entire Sharp family was like a passing cloud under the Rim, leaving their name only on a short creek by



Family pictures from Drew collection in Rim Country Museum. Monument and campground below by Stan Brown.

which we remember them, and which, like all place names, perks our interest.

Leaving a somewhat more permanent mark was the family of Frank Drew. They settled further down Sharp Creek, near its junction with Hunter Creek. About the only evidence left behind from their sojourn in the Rim Country is a monument placed by a later generation of the Drew family in 1978. As one crosses the little bridge over Sharp's Creek on the old road into Christopher Creek, a careful look to the upstream side of the bridge reveals a granite stone with a brass plaque in memory of Frank Pierce Drew and his wife Dessie. A second monument can be found a quarter mile downstream at the site of the Drew homestead. A cabin stood there until recent times when the Forest Service cleared such structures off forest land. The homestead had never been patented, so remained in government ownership. A campground has been established in the area.

Frank Pierce Drew was born in Sacramento, Calif. in 1855 where his family operated a lumber business. When he was 25, a friend, Joe Woods, who had pioneered in the Rim Country, wrote urging him to come to this wonderful spot in Arizona. He came in 1880 and landed a job as a ranch hand on the spread of Thomas Lacy Greer and his wife Catherine.

Tom Greer had been a wealthy Texas cattleman and community leader, caught up in the war over Texas' bid for independence from Mexico. By 1877 he had brought his family to Arizona where they established a homestead at the confluence of Silver Creek and the Little Colorado River. The next year he was appointed by Governor Fremont treasurer of Yavapai County, and he also purchased a large ranch northwest of St. Johns, which would become a million-acre ranching empire.

The Greer patriarch died in July of 1881, a year after Frank Drew arrived at the Greer Ranch. Frank soon became very close to the family, courting their daughter Deseret Dianna Greer, and they were married Oct. 4, 1883. They began a family with the birth of William Frank Drew, Feb. 20, 1886; then had a son Cecil Levi born Oct. 7, 1889. After a few years it was time for the Drew family to move out on their own, and in 1891 or 1892 they settled on the drainage that would later be named Sharp's Creek. There, another son, N. Baldwin Drew was born in 1892, the same year Frank Drew first signed the Great Register to vote. This was their only child born at Sharp's Creek, because for some reason they moved to Mesa, Ariz. in 1896, probably selling their squatter's rights.

In those early days the Drew

family had a number of good neighbors, such as Isadore and Mary Christopher just over the hill, Marion Derrick at Indian Gardens, and up and down Tonto Creek there were Haught families. However, the rugged life in the Rim Country was more than Dessie wanted to maintain. Furthermore, it is possible that Frank Drew discovered there was opportunity in Mesa for the lumber business, something many entrepreneurs were getting into in those days. The vast lumber resources in the Rim Country and on the Rim made this a likely prospect; especially since the Phoenix area was burgeoning and demanding building materials.

In Mesa the Drews had at least two more children, Frank Pierce Drew Jr. and Lloyd Anton Drew. He would die in 1917 at the age of 21 from typhoid fever.

On July 28, 1898 Frank's wife Dessie died. The following year he married Mary C. Benton, who also must have died because Frank married a third time on May 4, 1904. This time he married Mary Thompson. Frank lived to the age of 75 and died in Mesa in 1930. He was buried at his birthplace in Sacramento, Calif.

The Rim Country saw the fleeting presence of families like the Sharps and the Drews. They left their mark vaguely on the landscape and quietly passed on by.

[1] Pages 10, 38, 42

