

## History of the VX Ranch

Peter Verplancke first came from Belgium to the Encampment/Riverside area during the summer of 1890. Upon his arrival, he confirmed his plans to settle. However, he constantly expressed his desire to return to Germany for a short time because he had some "unfinished business" to attend to. Peter decided to set up a homestead, now known as the VX Ranch, and leave it in the hands of a hired man until he returned. During the three years Peter was back in Belgium, he had gotten married and convinced his new wife to move to Wyoming with him. Along with his "unfinished business," Peter finally arrived back in Riverside in the early months of 1903. Mr. Peter Verplancke was extremely proud to show his new wife, Emma Vermeersch Verplancke, the homestead. Emma's behavior demonstrated that she was quite excited about and impressed with the homestead, however, the ranch had plenty of surprises that came along with it. One major surprise that the ranch carried for Emma was the language of the surrounding people. She told Peter that the English language was beautiful, but she felt isolated because she did not know one word of it.

Despite the language barrier, Emma began gardening and helping on the ranch. Peter and Emma both loved gardening, and not long after Peter's return with Emma, he plowed a huge garden for her. In that garden she planted raspberries, currants, gooseberries, and potatoes, which were all eventually sold in Walden. Peter also planted a certain type of water willow near the house. The trees thrived, and two of the original shoots planted by Peter are still growing near the homestead house.

Water was beginning to be a problem. Peter decided to build a reservoir to store the spring run off. He joined six of his neighbors in digging, by hand, an irrigation ditch from the mountains. They agreed that each of the seven would get one share of the water from the ditch. Soon after beginning to dig the ditch, the seven men found that the surveyor had made a mistake and the water would have to run uphill for the last 200 yards. Peter however, was still determined to finish the ditch, and he dug the rest of the ditch by himself along a different and longer path. Peter's lone feat of labor and the respect it commanded gave him not only one share of the water, but two and one half shares. This water right is still held by the ranch, and it is one of the best water rights for ranchers in the Beaver Creek valley surrounding the VX Ranch.

Not only was Peter busy digging ditches and maintaining the ranch, he was also busy at home. Peter and Emma had started a family. They had four children, but when Emma was pregnant with the fifth child, Peter had a tragic accident. While he was returning to the house one day, Peter was run over by his own wagon. The heavy wagon had broken his pelvis. Peter was taken to the ranch house where he found that the youngest child had just been born. He spent limited time with his fifth child because he was rushed to Cheyenne for medical help. Despite the efforts of the doctors in Cheyenne, Peter Verplancke died on Nov. 7, 1909.

Only twenty-five years old at the time of Peter's death, Emma was left with five children and the homestead. She had trouble handling Peter's estate because she still did not speak fluent English. Charles Vyvey, who owned a homestead across from Emma, helped her untangle the mess. In May of 1911, Emma and Charles Vyvey were married and soon had a huge family. Their sons were Charles, John, Rene, Albert, Arthur, and their daughters were Vivian, and Grace. The family lived in the small, two-room homestead house that Peter built for many years. However, eventually Charles built a new house on the ranch. The new house was log and was quite a step up for the large family. It had two stories, with large bedrooms and a storeroom upstairs, and a living room, a large dining room, kitchen, and a milk storage room downstairs. It also had a full porch across the front.

The ranch eventually passed down the family to Charles and Emma's sons, Arthur (Fox) and Albert (Bert) Vyvey. Fox and Bert were partners, and Fox lived in the nice house that Charles built for Emma for over 70 years. At the time that Fox and Bert owned the ranch it was 4,200 acres, and ran 200 head of sheep and 300 head of mostly Herefords and Charolais cattle. They also built a new shop and a few little houses on the original homestead. Then in 1991 Fox and Bert sold the ranch to Fred Hyle. Fred soon sold to Swanda, and he eventually sold to the Silver Spur Land and Cattle, LLC.