

Celebrating 100 Years of Conservation and Public Service on the Medicine Bow

“Cowboys and Dude Ranches of the Early Medicine Bow”

Harry “Hoot” Jones was born on a ranch on Horse Creek, WY in 1882. He attended country school and learned a variety of ranching skills throughout his childhood. By the time he was a teenager, he had a successful rodeo career. It wasn't long before he established himself as one of the region's most skilled rodeo cowboys. The performance he is best remembered for was his show in the 1910 Cheyenne Frontier Days (CFD) rodeo. It was here that Jones displayed his stunning expertise of the sport by riding the previously unbridled bronc, Silver City. Hoot's famous ride was captured in awing photographs which were printed to promote the west in general, as well as in CFD publications, Union Pacific railroad schedules, postcards, murals, and on film. This ride caught the attention of people around the world and probably became the symbol for Wyoming—the silhouette of a cowboy on a bucking horse. This image captured the essence of the western cowboy and of Wyoming—“the Cowboy State.”

In 1909 Hoot Jones was invited by two Englishmen—the Gandy Brothers—to perform with other top rodeo cowboys, cowgirls, and Indians in Gandy's Wild West Show in England and Europe. Steer roping, fancy rope twirling, bronc busting. Wild west shows were extremely popular in Europe and the US, capturing the romance and spirit of the West.

The thrill of performing and traveling soon wore off for Hoot and he returned to Laramie and settled a ranch in the Laramie Plains Basin below Centennial. In 1914, he married his wife, Hattie, who was raised in Nebraska and was herself an advanced horseback rider and often participated in rodeo performances. There was a lake on their ranch, which they named “Lake Hattie.”

After their marriage Hoot spent his summers up near Brooklyn Lake. He initially built a wooden lean-to, and then eventually built a kitchen and dining room, and then started building a lodge in 1922. He finished the lodge in 1923 and began building cabins (22 by the end of the 1920's) and a horse corral. With completion of these projects, Hoot had a dude ranch he named Brooklyn Lodge. The first paying guests arrived in 1924. They were charged a mere \$3 per day or \$21 for a week with cabin and meals. Saddle horses were \$2 per day.

Hoot began hand shoveling the road to the lodge from Centennial the beginning of each April. He would hire a couple of young men and they would shovel every

day just so they could get into the lodge by the first of June. They shoveled a single path through the giant drifts just wide enough for one car.

Hoot died at the young age of 56. His wife Hattie operated the lodge for a while with her friend Clara Craig, who eventually purchased the lodge from Hattie in 1936. Mrs. Craig held ownership until 1940 when she sold it to Jerry Skinner. Skinner then turned the property over to his son. Ron Wells next purchased the business and remained there until 1971. In 1972 Harold Kissel of Cheyenne took ownership and used the lodge as a sleeping quarters for his hired help at the Mountain Meadow Guest Ranch across the road for 15 years. Chuck and Gloria Bell then purchased the lodge in 1987 and remain the present proprietors. By that time it was in state of severe deterioration. The Bells worked to get it listed on the National Registry of Historical Places and began major renovation.

Today the Brooklyn Lodge operates as a summer season bed and breakfast under special use permit. It is no longer a dude ranch, per se, but it, along with three other resorts on the Medicine Bow National Forest (Mountain Meadows Resort, Snowy Mountain Lodge, and Medicine Bow Lodge), provide opportunities for many recreationists to enjoy the beauty of the Medicine Bow NF and many recreational pursuits. In the early years of the Medicine Bow, there were several such dude ranches that provided opportunities for many recreationists. Today outfitters and guides authorized under special use permits provide this type of service on the forest.